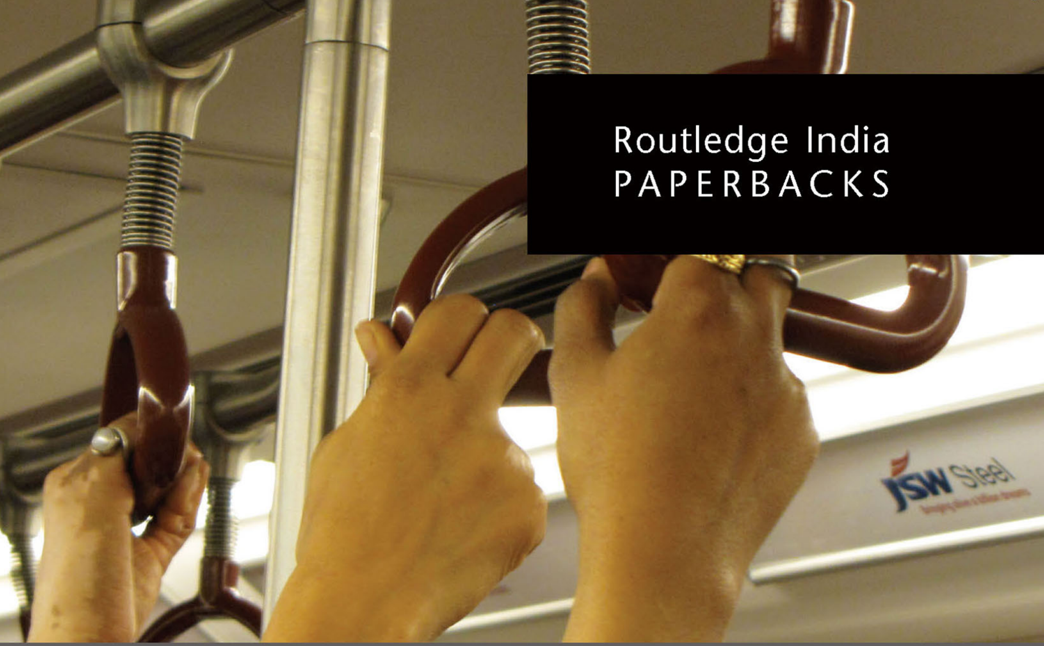

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The cultural politics of the Indian middle classes

Edited by
Amita Baviskar
and
Raka Ray

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Editors

Amita Baviskar

Raka Ray

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List of Abbreviations

AICC	All India Congress Committee
ATRs	Action Taken Reports
BAPS	Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha
BCA	Bachelor of Computer Applications
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
CAT	Combined Aptitude Test
CBFC	Central Board of Film Certification
CBSE	Central Board of Secondary Education
CFI	Cultural Festival of India
CM	Chief Minister
CPI (M)	Communist Party of India (Marxist)
CSDS	Centre for the Study of Developing Societies
CSE	Centre for Science and Environment
CSO	Central Statistical Organization
DDA	Delhi Development Authority
DIT	Delhi Improvement Trust
DLF	Delhi Land and Finance
EU	European Union
GDP	gross domestic product
GIH	global intellectual hegemony
GNP	gross national product
HR	Human Resource
IAMR	Institute of Applied Manpower Research
IAS	Indian Administrative Service
IDPAD	Indo-Dutch Programme in Alternative Development
IHHA	Indian Heritage Hotel Association
IIT	Indian Institute of Technology
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IPS	Indian Police Service
IT	Information Technology
ITES–BPO	IT-enabled Services–Business Process Outsourcing
JEE	Joint Entrance Examination
LPG	liquefied petroleum gas

MCD	Municipal Corporation of Delhi
MISH	Market Information Survey of Households
MLAs	Members of the Legislative Assembly
MP	Member of Parliament
MPCE	Monthly Per Capita Consumption Expenditure
NASSCOM	National Association of Software and Services Companies
NCAER	National Council for Applied Economic Research
NCC	National Cadet Corps
NDA	National Democratic Alliance
NIP	New Industrial Policy
NOIDA	New Okhla Industrial Development Area
NSS	National Sample Survey
NSSO	National Sample Survey Organisation
OBCs	Other Backward Classes
PATA	Pacific Asia Travel Association
PSC	Public Services Commission
PMT	Pre-medical Test
RTDC	Rajasthan Tourism Development Corporation
RWA	Residents' Welfare Association
RWAJF	Residents' Welfare Association Joint Front
SAPs	Structural Adjustment Programmes
SC	Scheduled Caste
SEZs	Special Economic Zones
ST	Scheduled Tribe
STPs	software technology parks
TCS	Tata Consultancy Services
TNCs	transnational corporations
UP	Uttar Pradesh
WBCS	West Bengal Civil Services

Glossary

aam aadmi	The ordinary man or Everyman
*abhanga*s	Verses by the *Bhakti* poets of Maharashtra
*bagh*s	Garden-palaces
bahujan	Lit., 'majority', used to refer to socially oppressed communities
*basti*s	Slums; working-class settlements
bhadra	Civilized, respectable
bhadralok	The Bengali middle class
bhadramahila	A female member of the bhadralok
*bhajan*s	Devotional songs
bhrashtachar	Corruption
*bhumiya*s	Small Rajputs
bijli, sadak aur pani	Electricity, roads and water
chanchal	Indisciplined
chaprasi	Peon
charpai	String bed
chaukidar	Watchman; guard
chhote bhaiyen	Younger brothers
chhoti service	A lower-grade government post
dalao	Garbage dump
daroga	Police inspector
dhoti-kurta	Traditional clothes for men
*doodhvala*s	Milkmen
*gali*s	Alleys
*garh*s	Fort palaces
ghee	Clarified butter
gobar	Dung
*gosadan*s	Cow shelters
haveli	An imposing house or mansion
izzat	Respectability
jagir	Feudal estate
*jagirdar*s	Feudal aristocrats who collected the revenue and provided local government
jagri	Semi-refined sugar
*jati*s	Local endogamous subcastes

jootha	The polluting leftovers of food
khalsa	Crown lands
kheti	Farming
khudkasht	Land under personal cultivation
lajja	Shame
lavni	A popular form of song and dance in western India
mahaul	Atmosphere
mamlatdar	Ruler
mansabdari	A system under the Mughals which conferred offices and income from landed estates to support incumbents
*mlechha*s	Barabarians or strangers
mora	Stool
muhalla	Neighbourhood
nandot	Husband's sister's daughter
*paanwallah*s	Betel-leaf sellers
palloo	The decorative part of the sari that hangs over the shoulder
roti, kapda aur makaan	Food, clothing and shelter
samsar	Household
*samskara*s	Ritualized codes of conduct
sardar	Officer
Shikarkhana	Hunting department
*shikhar*s	Spires
shivir	Lit., 'camp'; gathering or meeting
thakur	Among other things, the term for eldest brother in Rajput families
thikana	Estate
varna	Caste status order
zenana	Women's quarters

Acknowledgements

This volume emerged from a workshop held as part of the project on 'The Middle Classes in India: Identity, Citizenship and the Public Sphere' at the Institute of Economic Growth, Delhi. At the Institute, the administrative burden of the project was efficiently handled by a team led by Sushil Kumar Sen, Shankar Dhar and Bhupal Singh. The smooth progress of the project would not have been possible without their quiet backstage work. Kanchan Chopra, Director of the Institute, encouraged us with her warm enthusiasm. The project was supported by the Ford Foundation, New Delhi. Vanita Nayak Mukherjee, in charge of the Civil Society and Social Justice Programme, not only took a keen interest in our research but also provoked us to explore its political implications more fully.

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1 Introduction

Amita Baviskar and *Raka Ray*

'The Common Man', that silent presence anchoring R. K. Laxman's daily 'You Said It' cartoon strip in the *Times of India*, has been an iconic figure of Indian political commentary for more than 50 years.[1] Despite charting India's changing times since 1951, the Common Man has remained remarkably unchanged. He still wears a *dhoti-kurta* (traditional clothes) and a bemused expression. Yet traces of transformation are visible in the world that he inhabits: he has graduated from riding a bicycle to a car; where he once read the paper, now he watches the news on television with his formidable-looking wife. While the staples of satire — corrupt politicians, incompetent municipal authorities, bungling cricket teams — continue to animate the cartoon, we notice improvements in the material circumstances of the Common Man.

While Laxman's Common Man is a silent spectator in the world of politics, his alter ego, the *aam aadmi*, the ordinary person or Everyman, is vocal and active. According to the Indian media, the chief concerns of the aam aadmi today are *bijli, sadak aur pani* (electricity, roads and water). These priorities suggest that mobilization around *roti, kapda aur makaan* (food, clothing and shelter), which marked politics in the 1970s, is now passé; the demand for these bare essentials has been met and a second-order set of

---

[1] Laxman once said of his Common Man, 'A gloomy forecast about the increase in the cost of living, an additional tax burden, terrorism, endless scams, walkouts, water shortage, power failure are items that greet the Common Man as he wakes up and glimpses the headlines in the morning paper . . . He also witnesses riots, strikes, public meetings and so on. He voyages through life with quiet amusement, at no time uttering a word, looking at the ironies, paradoxes and contradictions in the human situation'. See R. K. Laxman. 1997. 'Companion of Fifty Years: The Life and Times of the Common Man', *Frontline*, 14 (16): 9–22, http://www.hinduonnet.com/fline/fl1416/14160900.htm (accessed 2 May 2009).

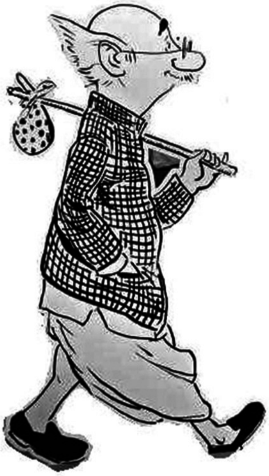

Plate 1.1. R. K. Laxman's Common Man

(© R. K. Laxman. Used with permission.)

concerns now constitutes the basic needs of ordinary Indians. Such a redefinition of needs does reflect the material improvement in the condition of many Indians over the last three decades. But it also conceals the fact that, for many *more* Indians, poverty and insecurity *and* hunger and sickness remain constant and insuperable features of everyday life. With the broadest definition of the middle class in India, it is estimated that the top 26 per cent of Indian households belong to this income group (see Sridharan, this volume). This means that about 70 per cent of the Indian households live on incomes that are substantially lower, with at least 40 per cent living below the poverty line. The politics of the aam aadmi does not include the poor or their concerns. It is a politics of and by the middle classes, and it signifies a sea change in the cultural and political life of independent India.

The ascendancy of the aam aadmi as a middle-class identity has long antecedents, but its apogee was reached in the era of economic liberalization in the 1990s. Liberalization introduced market forces into areas of the economy controlled by the state. It facilitated foreign direct investment and trade, freed business firms from the licence-permit raj, and eased banking regulations to increase consumer credit and encourage spending. At the centre of these policies was the idea of a middle class unleashed from the chastity belt of Nehruvian socialism and Indira-era austerities, finally able to savour the fruits of its disciplined and diligent work. This middle class would be the producer as well as the consumer driving the engine of economic growth and prosperity, a Fordist model of development re-engineered for India.

The phenomenal rate of growth of the Indian economy since the 1990s has been alternately described as 'India Rising' and 'India Shining'. This celebration, and the concomitant conviction that the nation should now claim its rightful place as an international superpower, is premised not only on the economic performance of the middle class but also its politics. As 'the world's largest democracy', India is believed to epitomize the ideals of political expression and negotiation that distinguish it from its economic rivals, most notably China. Liberal democracy, it is argued, would not have been possible without the presence of a middle class mediating and moderating the sharp social conflicts of an unequal society, pre-empting authoritarianisms of the Right and the Left. This middle class had been stifled by state domination and alienated by the electoral appeasement of 'vote-banks'; it can now reinvigorate politics by bringing in efficiency and rooting out corruption. A media campaign such as the *Times of India*'s 'Lead India' initiative, which sponsored English-educated, 'idealistic' young professionals to enter electoral politics, built upon such narratives of political decay and recovery.

In Marx's historical explanation for the development of capitalism in Europe, the bourgeoisie was a revolutionary class that broke through feudal social relations 'not only [to] transform the economic processes and structure of the society, but [also] reshape its politics and fundamentally rework the structure of values that dominates in the society' (Gill 2008: 3). The French writer Alexis de Tocqueville, visiting America in the 19th century, claimed that the strength of America's democracy derived from its prosperity and the possibility of upward mobility. For him, all the great revolutions of the world had occurred to eliminate inequality. It was the 'countless multitude of almost identical men, neither exactly rich nor poor, [who] own sufficient property to desire order but not enough to arouse the envy of others' (Tocqueville 2003 [1904]: 738), in other words, the middle classes, that were the mainstay of American democracy. These men (for Tocqueville, they were specifically men of European ancestry) in fact had a 'natural horror' of revolutions. The link between the middle class and democracy was re-asserted by Seymour Martin Lipset (1959), who believed that a middle class created both a more engaged citizenry and greater moderation. Writing in comparative historical mode, Barrington Moore (1993[1966]) also emphasized the importance of the bourgeoisie (the middle class and the owners of property) for democracy, but interpreted possible outcomes in terms of the alliances made by this class on the one hand, and the relative timing of events, on the other. Thus, his view about the link between the bourgeoisie and democracy was context-dependent. Scholars suggested that in post-Independence India the bourgeoisie was not strong enough to bring about a thorough-going shift to capitalism, and could only participate as a junior partner in what Gramsci called a 'passive revolution', a state-led command polity where 'the common sense of society' could not be changed to incorporate modern, democratic values (Kaviraj 1984: 225–26). With economic liberalization bringing the middle class to centre stage, it is argued that this group can educate the rest of the society about civic and democratic virtues, collectively creating a civil society that will reform the state and politics at large.

While there are studies which question the assertion that the middle classes form the primary link between capitalism and democracy,[2] claims about the progressive role of the middle class in the past, present and future of political and social change in India are widespread and influential. They demand careful scrutiny, especially given the lack of clarity about the term 'middle class'.

Historical accounts have revealed to us the processes by which a colonial middle class came into being in the late 19th and early 20th centuries through participation in particular projects — the creation of professions, social reform with a special emphasis on the status of women, regional literature and, of course, the anti-colonial struggle (see, for example, Dalmia 1996; Raychaudhuri 2002; S. Sarkar and T. Sarkar 2008). These accounts have tended to focus on what one might call the hegemonic fraction of the middle class, whose leadership in the nationalist movement secured the necessary legitimacy to continue to 'represent' the nation after Independence. Less is known about the vast swathe of the middle classes of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

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[2] Huber et al. argue that the link between capitalism and democracy is rooted in the fact that '[t]he working and middle classes — unlike other subordinated classes in history — gain an unprecedented capacity for self organization due to such developments as urbanization, factory production, and new forms of communication and transportation' (1993: 75).

When we talk about the middle classes today, to which precise social groups are we referring? Does it still make sense to think about projects of 'middle-classness'? While there is clearly a diverse set of actors in the postcolonial Indian middle classes, the iconic figure is that of the urban, white-collar worker, suggesting that education, occupation and income are critical elements of the definition. But this definitional clarity becomes blurred when we consider that despite working with their hands, skilled manual workers in public–sector firms earn at the same level and enjoy an equivalent lifestyle. And, with the proliferation of sub-contracted service–sector jobs, many white-collar workers earn amounts that place their households below the poverty line. In the Indian case, then, is there a single middle class that extends across the differences of caste, region and religion? If these differences are significant, then how do they inflect the politics of class? For instance, has the rising political power of the Other Backward Classes, or the creation of a 'creamy layer' among the dalits, changed the meanings of being middle-class? Is a 'convent-educated' son of a well-to-do Vokkaliga farmer in Karnataka middle-class in the same way as a Bengali Kayastha woman who works as a journalist with a Kolkata daily? What social characteristics, orientations and attitudes do they share? What projects and aspirations could they have in common? As these questions indicate, there is an empirical imprecision in discussions of the middle class that calls for closer observation and an analysis of the varied forms of material and cultural capital that define being middle-class.

Among the qualities attributed to the middle class are its distinctive values. When Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, and a Harrow-educated scion of a wealthy Brahmin lawyer, who grew up in one of the most elegant mansions in Allahabad, said, 'I am, of course, a middle-class person' (quoted in Chhibbar 1968: 53), he was being neither modest nor disingenuous. Besides indicating that he was not an industrial worker or a peasant, Nehru was also invoking a certain mindset. To be middle-class was to inhabit a particular orientation towards modernity. It meant being open-minded and egalitarian; following the rule of law and not being swayed by private motive or particularistic agenda; being fiscally prudent and living within one's means;[3] and embracing science and rationality in the public sphere. It demanded setting aside the primordial loyalties of caste and kinship and opening oneself to new affinities and associations based on merit, and to identities forged in the workplace. Echoes of these values still reverberate through the exhortations to the middle class to become more active in politics and to 'Lead India' out of the quagmire of corruption and parochialism in which the nation has been stuck.

Does the middle class actually represent these values in the public sphere? Survey data on middle-class voting preferences, as well as the public demonstrations of support for the anti-Mandal agitation and the demolition of the Babri Masjid, indicate that the middle class can be zealous in protecting upper-caste privilege and promoting Hindutva (Hasan 2001: 159). Dipankar Gupta excoriates the Indian middle class thus: 'Its commitment to principles of democracy is weak . . . [I]t thrives on connections, family and patronage. Instead of animating public institutions, members of this class are constantly undermining them . . . [T]he Indian middle class is an ardent advocate of privilege' (D. Gupta 2000: 10). Another commentator, observing the immunity of this class to the abject poverty and deprivation around it, remarks that the middle class is 'morally neutral to inequity' (Varma 2001: 88).

These comments express a bitterness brought on by a promise betrayed. However, if we adopt a more detached perspective on middle-class values and practices, it becomes apparent that the middle classes have historically deployed their cultural capital in contradictory ways. As Sanjay Joshi points out (this volume; also see Joshi 2001), the politics catalysed by the middle class in India spoke in the language of reason *and* sentiment, voicing the need to initiate radical change while simultaneously calling for the preservation of tradition, advocating liberty *and* authoritarianism, equality *and* hierarchy, all at the same time. These contradictions are inherent in the middle class's claim of being an enlightened representative of public opinion while also needing to distinguish itself clearly from the lower orders. This duality creates a deep ambivalence about popular politics, with the middle class seeking to discipline *and* mobilize subordinate social groups. According to Joshi (this volume), this is not a disappointing deviation from the historical role played by the European middle classes; across the world, the notion of an authentic middle class, progressive and liberal in its views, is a myth.

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[3] Middle-class prudence is also associated with more puritanical tendencies, such as an obsession with 'respectability' and sexual propriety — the 'middle-class morality' so wittily lamented by Alfred Doolittle, Eliza's father in George Bernard Shaw's play *Pygmalion.*

If the notion of a progressive middle class that sustains a free and open sphere of reasoned debate where 'public interest' can be decided and acted upon is a myth, if the middle class actually represents and defends elite privilege that excludes the majority of Indian citizens, then perhaps one should look more closely at the category itself. The empirical issues around identifying the middle class need to be supplemented by an analysis of the ideological work performed by this social construct. Political scientist Yogendra Yadav suggests that the Indian middle class is not to be thought of as a sociological category at all, but, rather, as a proper noun. It is the term which the Indian ruling class prefers to call itself.[4] Satish Deshpande argues that the power of the middle class resides in its claim of representing all Indians — the aam aadmi. The category 'middle class' conjures up a universal, unifying identity that summons legitimacy for projects that favour elites in the nation. By claiming to speak for the nation, this category performs the cultural task of concealing inequality. It is this ideological role of articulating hegemonic values and beliefs that distinguishes middle-class politics. Satish Deshpande writes that the

> middle class is the class that articulates the hegemony of the ruling bloc. It both a) expresses this hegemony by translating the relations of domination into the language of legitimation; and b) mediates the relationship between classes within the ruling bloc, as well as between this bloc and other classes. (Deshpande 2003: 139)

In a democracy, the cultural reproduction of inequality requires a public discourse of equality. The task of maintaining this paradox is accomplished by the idea of the middle class, a class which speaks on behalf of all others. Yet what are the specific sites and practices that accomplish this social alchemy, that is, the transmutation of particular elite interests to universal national ideologies?

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[4] Yogendra Yadav, talk given at a workshop on 'Civil Society and Activism in Neoliberal India' at the Institute of Economic Growth, 15 January 2009.

Leela Fernandes (2006) points out that the idea of the middle class has taken on another set of meanings that are particular to this moment of Indian history. It has come to embody India's transition to a liberalizing nation. Liberalization promises the pleasures of the market — a cornucopia of commodities magical and sensuous — as a hedonistic supplement to an older middle-class concern with maintaining social distance. To be a part of the middle class is to express oneself through consumption, and to establish one's identity as being distinct from the lower classes through a set of cultural markers that proclaim one's 'good taste' and style (Sheth 1999b). To be middle class in India today means to be no longer confined to the 'waiting room' of modernity (Chakrabarty 2000: 9–10). It calls for practices of consumption that mark one's social identity as distinct from the middle class of the past and from the lower classes of the present (see Bourdieu 1984), while also signifying solidarity with 'people like us' or the social group one aspires to belong to. As Jeffery et al. (this volume) show, keeping a pet dog and naming it 'Jackie' becomes an expression of urbanity and sophistication for a well-to-do Jat household in rural Uttar Pradesh. These ways of being middle-class and striving to master its cultural codes require not just material resources, but the imaginative work and self-discipline essential to cultivating new forms of subjectivity (Mahmood 2005). The desire to be middle-class, to belong properly to this superior social group, is also a powerful aspiration among excluded social groups (see Guru 2001). When such groups seek entry into the middle class, how does their presence change the dynamics within this class? Do they, in turn, transform the cultural meanings and social experience of being middle-class? And what might their failure to achieve entry signify?

Questions about the role and composition of the middle class have been examined and debated in the academy and in the political sphere for more than a 100 years. They have acquired a certain urgency in the Indian context since the 1990s, when economic liberalization brought the middle class into prominence. At first, the debate primarily focused on the size of the middle class, its magnitude a proxy for the size of the market for consumer goods and, therefore, the growth potential of the Indian economy. The *India Market Demographics Report 2002* by the National Council for Applied Economic Research (Rao 2004) sparked off a fever of speculation, financial as well as intellectual, about the 'strength' of this class, as measured by its capacity to consume (see Sridharan, this volume). This discussion was dominated by economists and demographers, business analysts, and corporate media keen to repackage their newspaper or television channel as delivering guaranteed audiences to advertisers.[5] This body of work, largely congratulatory in tone, was countered by sociological writing that took a more critical stance towards the middle class, disputing its progressive role in political life and arguing that middle-class cultural dominance resulted in the reproduction, not amelioration, of inequality (Deshpande 2003; Fernandes 2006).

Sociologists and political scientists writing on the middle class in India have tended to base their analyses on macro-level data about the country's population and economy such as the demographic correlates between caste and class. More grounded empirical accounts have focused primarily on patterns of consumption, relating them to the formation of cultural identities and orientations towards modernity (Breckenridge 1995; Donner 2008; Jaffrelot and van der Veer 2008; Mankekar 1999; Mazzarella 2003; Rajagopal 1999; Srivastava 2007). Other scholars have chosen to follow a more classic political economy approach, trying to situate the Indian middle class within a Marxist paradigm of class consciousness and political conflict (Béteille 2001). While analyses at these empirical and conceptual scales have produced broad-brush pictures of the category, the conspicuous absence of detailed, fine-grained ethnographic studies has meant that more fluid processes of change and more complex social relations and cultural identities have been ignored. Theory has been used as a blunt instrument to hammer home pronouncements about Nationalism, Modernity and the Middle Class, without closely focusing on the actual practices of being and becoming middle-class, practices that exceed or uneasily fit the grand narratives of social theory. To address these lacunae, the essays in this volume speak to the concerns of social theory, but through ethnographies that reveal the multiple meanings of the middle-class experience. In order to do so, the volume addresses a diverse and more comprehensive range of middle-class practices, looking not only at consumption, but production and reproduction, as well as the public sphere. Through ethnographic analyses at a variety of sites — dealing with different dimensions of everyday life, as well as sites dispersed across time and space — these essays offer a deeper and richer appreciation of middle-class life and politics.

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[5] We may speculate that the Bharatiya Janata Party-led National Democratic Alliance's ultimately unsuccessful 'India Shining' campaign in 2005 was based on the erroneous impression given by these celebratory reports that the entire country was being lifted into the middle class.

This book examines the middle classes — who they are and what they do — and their influence in shaping contemporary cultural politics in India.[6] It describes the historical emergence of these classes, their changing relationships with colonial power and with the Indian state, as well as with other social groups. It shows how the middle classes have changed, with older groups shifting out and new entrants taking up residence, thereby transforming the character and meanings of the category. The essays in this volume observe multiple sites of social action — workplaces and homes, schools and streets, cinema and sex surveys, temples and tourist hotels — to delineate the lives of the middle classes and show how middle-class definitions and desires articulate hegemonic notions of the normal and the normative. The book traces middle-class attempts to demarcate and dominate the public sphere of debate — what is important, how it should be discussed and by whom — and the challenges they face from excluded groups. It shows how a heterogeneous, internally differentiated social formation has become a powerful unifying idea that drives political discourse on matters ranging from economic and social policy to international affairs.

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[6] While the editors and some of the contributors to this volume (e.g., Jeffery et al.) prefer to refer to the 'middle classes' in the plural, indicating the multiplicity and heterogeneity of the social segments that comprise this category, other contributors (e.g., Fernandes) have chosen to refer to the 'middle class' in the singular, arguing that it is internally differentiated. All contributors, however, also conceive of the category of a singular 'middle class' as an ideological construct, intended to project a unity and coherence that papers over the internal contradictions and conflicts within this class/es.

Finally, it explores the argument that the cultural dominance of the middle class has effectively undermined and even subverted the democratic possibilities inherent in Indian politics.

Who are the middle classes? Economy, politics and history

The book is organized into three parts. The opening section, 'Who are the middle classes?', offers several different perspectives on the question. The first two essays exemplify the two macro-approaches discussed earlier: one using quantitative data to describe the contours and characteristics of the middle class, the other bringing to bear concepts from Marxist political economy to explain its political role. The essay by E. Sridharan synthesizes macro-level data from several sources to provide a demographic profile of India's population, showing the growth of an intermediate class in India. It analyzes the various income and occupation characteristics of this class in order to depict its heterogeneity, trying to estimate the fraction of the middle class that is in public employment or dependent on public subsidies, to show how this creates uneven support for policies of economic liberalization. Besides orientations to economic policy, the essay also examines the changing relationship between class and caste, and how the caste composition of the middle classes affects their leanings in electoral politics. The question of middle-class heterogeneity is the starting point for Leela Fernandes's essay which argues that rather than trying to 'fix' and measure an unstable category, one should focus on its social effects. Her essay examines two major aspects of middle-class practices: one, how they reproduce inequality, and two, how they strive to create hegemonic notions of India as a liberalizing nation. Both essays point out that liberalization has met with mixed responses from the middle classes; and that there have been significant shifts in the caste character of the middle classes. Fernandes's essay links these differences to the production of a 'fractured hegemony' in Indian society, where conflicts *between* middle-class groups, new and old, are as consequential in shaping democratic politics as conflicts between different classes.

The conflicts engendered by the contradictions in middle-class consciousness are the subject of Sanjay Joshi's essay which offers two intertwined strands of argument. The essay traces the emergence of a middle class in Lucknow at the cusp of colonial and Nawabi power. It also describes this class's anxiety about its cultural authenticity, the contrary tugs of East and West, tradition and modernity. After delineating the ambivalent response of this class to colonial modernity, and its nagging apprehension that, despite their best efforts, Indians fail to measure up to the progressive standards of the European middle classes, Joshi argues that discussions on the middle class, then and now, continue to be constrained by comparisons with an ideal-type derived from simplistic notions of European history. That is, when it comes to the European middle class embodying progressive and liberal values, 'there is no there there' (Stein 1937: 289). Joshi's account is at once a critique of middle-class politics in colonial Lucknow and a critique of contemporary historiography, which attempts to 'provincialize Europe' (Chakrabarty 2000), while recognizing its deep imprint on the imagination of the Indian middle class.

Two essays attest to the complex relationship between economic, cultural and social capital when it comes to the question of 'middle-classness'. After examining a comparative history of the fate of 'old regimes' and the constructivist nature of class formation, Susanne Rudolph and Lloyd Rudolph's essay focuses on the transformation of Rajasthan's Rajput feudal class into a business-oriented middle class. The cultural glue that unites the two statuses is the attraction of 'the royal experience' for foreign and domestic tourists. The success of Rajputs as middle-class operators of a hospitality industry that replicates the royal experience depends on the extent to which they are able to preserve their identity as credible aristocrats. It shows the gradual process by which status differences among land-owning Rajputs, which had been smoothed over in feudal times through an ethos of solidarity and equality, came to be magnified and refracted through the prism of class as a result of state interventions such as the merger of princely states with the Union of India, land reforms and the abolition of privy purses. Rudolph and Rudolph describe the making of the middle classes through practices of education and occupation. They focus on Mayo College as a key institution where Rajput boys learned to be modern, and on heritage hotels as businesses that allow owners with run-down palaces and *haveli*s (mansions) to keep alive their patrimony and their patronage of artisan castes — essential elements in maintaining an aristocratic identity — while cashing in on opportunities provided by India's burgeoning tourist trade.

This double move of becoming middle-class while retaining a material and mental foothold in other worlds is also evident in the practices of 'seriously rich' Jats, the social group described in the essay by Jeffery, Jeffery and Jeffrey. The essay shows the tensions between trying to inhabit an urban, middle-class world and living in a rural context, without easy access to the amenities that support middle-class lifestyles or to avenues for emulating that aspirational class. The essay discusses a range of strategies by which Jat families strive to overcome their cultural disadvantage — moving out of agriculture into trade and white-collar work; giving large dowries to marry their daughters into urban, 'professional' families; using their expanding networks in urban areas to educate their sons (and, sometimes, daughters); having smaller families; and adopting the more visible signifiers of middle-class modernity through dress and domestic practices.

The essay by Jeffery et al. captures the uncertainties involved in the process of becoming middle-class. Belonging to the middle classes is not the inevitable outcome of having the appropriate education, income and occupation; it also requires a different kind of investment, entailing not only economic and social capital — the mobilization of kin networks, for instance — but also the psychic investment of desire and discipline. Invariably, there are some failures. The essay describes the predicament of young Jat men whose lives are in limbo as they wait, year after year, to find the job that will catapult them into middle-class status and security (see also Jeffrey et al. 2007). Their essay also shows that for rural Jats (and, one suspects, similarly located dominant-caste land-owners around the country), the cultural meanings of being middle-class are inextricably linked to ideas of being modern and urban. This reiterates one of the main arguments of this book, that there is much more to being middle-class than can be read off from economic and social indicators, and that understanding the meanings of middle-classness requires ethnographic description and analysis.

Being and becoming middle-class: Work, domesticity and consumption

The new middle classes are produced in key sites such as the economy, educational institutions and the home, the focus of essays in the second section of the book.[7] Relations in the workplace and in domestic spaces forge orientations to the self and to others, in conscious and unconscious ways. In his landmark study of French practices of distinction and exclusion deployed by various class fractions, Pierre Bourdieu suggests that there 'is an immediate adherence, at the deepest level of the habitus, to the tastes and distastes, sympathies and aversions, fantasies and phobias which, more than declared opinions, forge the unconscious unity of a class' (Bourdieu 1984: 77). The attitudes and beliefs to which Bourdieu alludes are not individually or consciously held, but adhere to one's habitus, and may best be thought of as *class dispositions*. The essays in this section reflect processes of conscious and unconscious gatekeeping even as different fractions of the middle class react to and are shaped by structural and discursive shifts in the past two decades. The contributors discuss both the triumphs of Information Technology (IT) executives and the anxieties of low-end white-collar workers, and the quotidian practices of work, home and schooling which reproduce these triumphs and anxieties.

Two essays in this section focus on the software industry, which is currently seen as the supreme reflection of, and receptacle for, India's new middle classes. Carol Upadhya's essay notes the disproportionate influence of the industry given its actual size, and argues that the centrality of its role is both structural and discursive. In a series of sleights of hand, the industry represents itself as both rooted in older middle-class values of hard work and austerity and as the harbinger of the new world of possibilities. While the IT industry is perceived as a provider of new opportunities for rural youth and the marginalized, the majority of IT workers are, in fact, the urban upper-caste beneficiaries of India's educational policies. It is also believed to have ushered in a 'new, more enlightened work culture, displacing the corrupt and inefficient management practices of the old economy'(Upadhya, this volume), but is not actually exempt from such practices, as the revelations of corruption and fraud by one of India's IT giants, Satyam, in late 2008 showed. IT workers can proudly espouse meritocratic ideologies and oppose affirmative action, precisely by misrecognizing how they have benefited from government policies (see also Upadhya and Vasavi 2008). In short, the IT workplace, while idealizing the worker who is simultaneously global and national, continues to reproduce the inequalities associated with differential access to cultural capital. Upadhya's essay also points to the role of the chroniclers of the IT industry in producing the ideology of its 'middle-classness'. Biographies of IT pioneers construct the image of the new middle classes as emerging from, and yet antithetical to, the old middle classes. Thus Narayana Murthy, one of the co-founders of Infosys, who is among India's richest men, can be portrayed as a representative of the new middle class.

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[7] At the same time, there are also several new sites of production of middle-class identity where subaltern aspirants can hope to gain legitimate entry. The huge popularity of talent-based reality shows such as *Dance India Dance, Indian Idol* and *Saregamapa* indicates that talents such as singing and dancing, long considered hobbies, are a new venue through which upward mobility can be achieved, or dreamed about. The shows reveal that for middle-class aspirants and their parents, while education remains the primary vehicle for 'middle-classness', it is no longer the only one.

A dominant image of the IT industry and the new middle class has been the woman engineer who enacts a certain 'progressive Indian femininity' in contrast to a more traditional Indian femininity. Smitha Radhakrishnan's essay highlights the ideological place of gender in the making of the new Indian middle class. Through the creation of a respectable femininity, reinforced in the IT workplace, Radhakrishnan suggests that the vast distance from the rest of the nation that the IT workplace actually represents is made to disappear through ideological work. In other words, the IT workers' representation of themselves as *Indian* discursively closes a vast material gap between IT India and the rest of India. Constructions of gender are crucial to the discursive closing of the gap. On the one hand, 'the professionalism of IT becomes synonymous with the possibility of gender equality, thought to signal progress for women in India'(Smitha Radhakrishnan, this volume). On the other, the much-hyped success of professional women in IT is countered by men who want working wives who are not too ambitious, as well as by women in the industry who pride themselves on bridging the gap between the global and India through their ability to be professional in the world of work without sacrificing their families. The performance of this dual identity gives India an edge over the merely materialistic West, and gestures towards a femininity with which the majority of Indians are comfortable.

If the representation of the middle class is increasingly monopolized by the IT sector and similar professionals whose main political tenor is a celebration of liberalization, Ruchira Ganguly-Scrase and Timothy Scrase remind us of those whose middle-classness derives from public–sector work or low-level private–sector white-collar work, and for whom the new economic moment has meant a downward trajectory (also see Ganguly-Scrase and Scrase 2009). Their study, which is situated in West Bengal, is also a salutary reminder of the fact that the middle class must be conceived of in regional terms. Against the backdrop of a quarter century of CPI(M) governance and white-collar unionization, privatization is seen as less of a boon in West Bengal than it is in many other states. The majority of white-collar workers interviewed by Ganguly-Scrase and Scrase claim that privatization offers no benefits, contrasting the reliable, impartial and merciful state to the harshness of privatization. Yet, these workers also echo the global language of efficiency and self-regulation, indicating a contradictory set of beliefs around liberalization. While on the one hand, this group may sound like the old middle class, they are in fact a newly anxious class in decline, the potential losers in the new economic regime.

Like Ganguly-Scrase and Scrase, Nita Kumar focuses her essay not on the dominant fraction of the middle class but those who must actively work to maintain their position within it. Several contributors to this volume note the importance of cultural capital for the maintenance of middle-classness and for entry into its ranks. The education system is a key site for the transmission of cultural capital, and thus for the reproduction of the middle class. Nita Kumar's essay draws attention to the anxieties around the possible failure to acquire the cultural capital necessary for children to succeed in the new economy. Kumar argues that whereas once both family and school educated the middle-class child, today the family has been eclipsed by the school, and sees its role purely as ensuring the success of the child at school. Because the content of the education may itself seem foreign and unfamiliar to many parents, who feel themselves inadequate to the task of ensuring their child's success at school, coaching institutes or extra-school institutions are increasingly relied upon to ensure success in competitive entrance examinations. While the actual education system fails its students, coaching centres, whose teachers charge far more money than a school, are seen to offer a possibility of success, at least for those who can afford them. But as Kumar suggests, for many, failure is a more likely outcome than success.

Seemin Qayum and Raka Ray shift the exploration of middle-classness to the site of the home. In examining middle-class reliance on domestic servants, Qayum and Ray suggest that classes come into being not just through practices of consumption or production outside the home but also through labour and intimate practices within the home. They argue that, within these spaces, the Indian middle class constitutes itself through the institution of domestic servitude, which is closely tied to the self-conscious evolution of a modern Indian middle class and elite (see also Ray and Qayum 2009). Cultural changes in the middle class are reflected in changes in servant–management techniques. Examining both older (nationalist) and younger (globalized) employers, they found that both sets of employers consciously compared the past life of their families and households to present circumstances, and invoked sentiment as well as expedience to hold on to aspects of Kolkata's culture of servitude, rooted in the city's feudal past, while viewing themselves as the vanguard of Indian modernity. Even as the middle classes are forced to accommodate to Kolkata's land prices and move from free-standing bungalows to flats of various sizes, the space of the home, across class fractions of the middle class and across generations, is unimaginable without the essential servant.

Practices of middle-classness in each of these sites involve a politics of exclusion and inclusion that spills over into the public sphere in complex ways. How do we understand democracies which embed relations of servitude in the home? How do we assess the value of institutions such as schools when private solutions are continually sought? What do we make of the new routes to middle-classness sought by young people from small towns all over India today? And finally, how should the politics of the workplace be factored into our understanding of larger political sensibilities?

Middle-class politics, citizenship and the public sphere

That the middle class plays a progressive role in creating a public sphere — an arena for deliberative democracy within civil society — has, as we have discussed above, been a persistent notion in political theory as well as a popular self-representation of the class itself.

At the same time, critiques of this notion have been equally longstanding. Prominent among these are Jürgen Habermas's commentaries on capitalism and democracy which grapple with Kant's articulation of the ideal of the bourgeois public sphere as a space where 'practical reason was institutionalized through norms of reasoned discourse in which arguments, not statuses or traditions, were to be decisive' (Calhoun 1992: 2). For Kant, the emphasis on rationality marked a decisive break from pre-Enlightenment modes of discursive authority. However, Kant did not focus on other aspects of bourgeois rationality: viz., its presumption of universal validity and applicability, as well as its inherent paternalistic conceit of knowing and being best able to decide for others. As Habermas pointed out, historically, the early bourgeois public spheres were composed of narrow segments of the European population, mainly educated, propertied men, and they conducted a discourse that not only excluded others but was prejudicial to their interests. With liberal democracy, the public sphere expanded to include hitherto excluded social groups such as women and the working class, which diluted the (high) standard of public discourse. Another new challenge came from organized capitalism where 'the key tendency was to replace the shared, critical activity of public discourse by a more passive culture consumption on the one hand and an apolitical sociability on the other' (ibid.: 23). In this scenario, public discourse became a façade for bourgeois class interests; its critical edge was replaced by conformity fostered by corporate capitalism. Even the world of print-capitalism, essential to the emergence of a thinking, debating public, was colonized: 'The world fashioned by the mass media is a public sphere in appearance only' (Habermas 1989: 171, quoted in Calhoun 1992: 23).

Critics of Habermas's notion of the public sphere point out that the trajectory towards greater inclusion that he described did not actually take place in the West. Despite the rhetoric of public-ness and accessibility, the official public sphere was based on, even constituted by, a number of significant exclusions along the axes of gender and class (Fraser 1992: 113). Historically, the liberal public sphere was situated in the field of 'civil society', a network of associations and clubs that fostered debate, a training ground for bourgeois men to express and develop their fitness to govern the public.

How well do these ideas of the middle class and the public sphere, derived as they are from Western experiences, travel to contexts such as India which have more deeply stratified societies? Has capitalism played a similar or parallel role in fashioning the forms of political engagement in this country? Does economic liberalization and its promise of more participatory consumption — the *demos* created by cheap mobile phones and one-rupee shampoo sachets — produce a democratic dividend for politics or does it direct attention away from questions of equality and justice? Which institutional practices (for instance, of the state, the mass media) have combined to create an idea of India in which middle-class ideologies have become the taken-for-granted common sense of society? What is the style and substance of middle-class cultural practices in the public sphere? What contradictions and contestations mark these mobilizations? And finally, how can one empirically trace the political presence and influence of a hegemonic class whose power lies in its ability to shape the subconscious, the grammar of politics?

Perhaps the answer to the last question, and a clue to the others as well, lies in the inevitable incompleteness of the project of being middle-class. Its internal inconsistencies as well as the challenges it encounters from those whom it seeks to discipline — the entrants and the excluded — render the middle class visible in all its awkwardness and insecurity. Take, for instance, the middle classes' uneasy relationship with caste and other forms of 'primordial' identity. As Satish Deshpande (2003) has shown in the context of the debate on reservations for Other Backward Classes, urban elites maintain their privileged access to prized social goods such as jobs and education by building on the cultural capital accumulated over generations of upper-caste dominance. Yet they deny this connection between caste and class by framing their opposition to affirmative action within a discourse of 'merit' and achievement versus ascription (also see Upadhya, this volume). Political mobilization by the Other Backward Classes has countered the ability of urban elites to disavow their own (upper) caste status by revealing how caste dominance is disguised as 'merit', thus making visible a fundamental issue in Indian politics that had hitherto been misrecognized.

If the conventional understanding has been that being middle-class militates against identity politics, it appears that in the contemporary Indian context, *becoming* middle-class helps produce the politics of caste and other communitarian identities with new vigour. For instance, the emergence of leaders like Kanshi Ram and Mayawati from a section of dalits who became middle-class through access to government jobs led to the formation of a *bahujan* (lit., majority, used to refer to socially oppressed communities) identity that addressed all dalit. So also in adivasi areas, where the political mobilization around access to land and forests — quintessential 'class' issues — morphed into a cultural politics that fused identity issues with questions of resource control only when a middle-class stratum emerged amongst the adivasis (see Baviskar 1997, 2005). That is, instead of erasing their cultural difference upon reaching middle-class status, new entrants from subaltern groups created a more charged political valence around their stigmatized identity and used it to mobilize collectively across class. Significantly, such identity politics transform the meanings and practices of being middle-class in the public sphere. If an earlier generation deployed the discourse of middle-classness to deny the salience of caste and to sweep all social groups into the hold-all rubric of the Nation, the current generation of middle-class activists from subaltern groups brings questions of discrimination and relative rankings within the nation to centre stage.

It should also be noted that this social friction does not abrade the idea of India, but, in fact, feeds and fertilizes the bed in which it flows. New entrants to the middle classes broaden and deepen the notion of the nation, notably at a time when it is being argued that liberalization and globalization have diluted the significance of the nation state. Patrick Heller (2009), for example, suggests that the newly globalized middle classes, more tuned into transnational than national flows, are disarticulated from the class structure of India, and that therefore their class projects may be somewhat different from those of the past.

The social surge from below has evoked ambivalent responses from the established middle classes. On the one hand, it is clearly seen as threatening their privilege, and sections of the middle class have mobilized forthwith to contain it. On the other, there continues to exist among certain sections of the middle class, a tenuous, tentative belief in the liberal ideals that the middle class is supposed to stand for: being egalitarian and open-minded; safeguarding the public interest; and promoting projects of Improvement. This commitment, a lingering residue perhaps of the values of the generation that struggled for Independence, cannot be dismissed simply as a self-aggrandizing myth. It is manifest in the stray attempts to meet subaltern groups half-way in their quest for upward mobility — coaching the school-going children of one's domestic worker, for instance.[8] The idealized notion of the middle class is thus powerful enough to expand and deepen this group's politics beyond a straightforward concern with maintaining its dominance.

The complexity of middle-class politics comes out vividly in William Mazzarella's essay on censorship in Indian cinema (this volume). At first glance, censorship is the perfect example of bourgeois domination and the double standards of the Indian middle class. Interviews with the heads of the film censor board show that they invoke liberal ideals such as freedom of expression, but are reluctant to apply them to films intended for 'mass' audiences who are deemed to be child-like and corruptible, and simultaneously lascivious and excitable. From the point of view of the censors, the masses are politically immature and sexually repressed, and require censorship to be protected from themselves. However, legal debates indicate that censorship also seems to evoke other, equally important, anxieties around class and citizenship. The affective and sensuous quality of cinema, the source of its power and hence danger, is now more widely available through advertising and other modes of public communication in the era of economic liberalization. Liberalization promises a mode of citizenship grounded in sensuous resonance (Mazzarella 2003); its affect-saturated images and sounds hover between sanctioned desire and the pornography of fetishized commodities. Policing the play of desires in this public sphere is infinitely harder, hence these desires (and the anxieties about their transgression) get displaced to the 'safe zone' of cinema censorship. Mazzarella argues that censorship is not simply about the Indian middle classes being allied against the subalterns; middle-class discourse has to invent 'the masses' as the locus for a sensuous volatility that it cannot acknowledge in itself.

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[8] While this egalitarian urge does not seem motivated by 'middle-class guilt' per se, there is nonetheless a sense of shouldering the burden of social responsibility which has tended to take the form of NGO-based service delivery rather than supporting mobilization based on political rights. Yet, even political activists from the extreme Left, ideologically inclined to be suspicious of the do-gooding impulses of 'class enemies', acknowledge that the potential for middle-class participation in wider progressive politics remains alive, especially amongst the youth.

That notions of morality are inherent in how citizenship is imagined becomes evident in Sanjay Srivastava's essay on Delhi's Akshardham temple and the Bhagidari scheme of participatory city governance. Examining the role of organized religion and the state in the simultaneous making of middle-class identities and urban spaces, Srivastava points out that the construction of the Akshardham temple on the floodplain of the Yamuna river was allowed even though it violated Delhi's Master Plan and other land-related regulations. No such clemency was shown to the squatter settlements that lined the river's banks. The Bhagidari scheme too is confined to middle-class neighbourhoods in the city and excludes the poorer shanty settlements. Both examples show how urban residents of different classes have a differential relationship to state discourses of legality and illegality. According to Srivastava, the Akshardham temple, together with the new malls and highways, produces a space within contemporary modernity where the 'moral' middle class can display its mastery over consumption. These practices demonstrating middle-class virtuosity — discernment about the correct kind of consumption, judgements about the proper balance between tradition and modernity — are spatialized: the temple and the neighbourhood associations define clean and unclean spaces and specify the kind of corporate managerialism appropriate for their administration. Srivastava's essay shows the tensions in these discourses of citizenship that bring together the caring state and the consuming family, and how 'the moral middle class simultaneously elaborates and evades its vocation'.

Continuing the theme of urban space and middle-class strategies of management, Amita Baviskar's essay treats the city street as an embodied public sphere, a contested terrain where middle-class aesthetics and politics contend with the unruliness of species, social groups, and a well-organized web of illegalities that links the state to the citizens. Bourgeois environmentalists, seeking to control the traffic of cows and cycle-rickshaws on the streets of Delhi, appeal to the courts for order, but the force of judicial authority is neutralized by the resistance, passive and active, jointly produced by municipal officials and the citizens who (are compelled to) suborn them. The essay points to distinctive middle-class modes of mobilization: channelling causes through the courts and the media, and framing them as matters of 'public interest'. Middle-class anxieties about 'matter out of place'— stray cows as well as rural migrants who pedal cycle-rickshaws — and aspirations about living in a 'world-class' city combine in attempts to discipline nature and society. Yet these efforts run aground, not only due to the resistance posed by social groups with threatened livelihoods, but also the failure of the middle class to recognize and regulate its own contribution to urban congestion. The challenge of maintaining this misrecognition is the heart of the cultural politics of dominance in India. On its ever-changing, everyday outcomes depends the life of the Indian body politic, its public sphere and those who strive for equality and justice within it and without.

This collection of essays thus shows how a heterogeneous, internally-differentiated social formation has become a powerful unifying idea that drives political discourse on matters ranging from economic and social policy to international affairs. It explores the argument that the cultural dominance of the middle classes has effectively undermined and even subverted the democratic possibilities inherent in Indian politics. By presenting scenes from the lives of the middle classes as they practice and create their middle-classness on the one hand, and delineating the workings of the dominant ideology of 'the middle class' on the other, we are able to cut through the mystification about the myth of the middle class while gaining an appreciation of the complexity and contradictions within this category. It is indeed in the ideological interplay of its conception of itself as both Everyman and elite vanguard that this relatively tiny proportion of India makes its mark, both at home and in the world.

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Who are the middle classes? Economy, politics and history

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The Growth and Sectoral Composition of India's Middle Classes: Their Impact on the Politics of Economic Liberalization

E. Sridharan

This essay aims to analyze the growth of the middle classes in India since the 1980s, in order to understand its implications for the process of economic liberalization which began in 1991. The case that is usually made is that over the period of the early 1980s, when the Gross National Product (GNP) grew at a higher rate of above 5 per cent, as compared to 3.5 per cent in the 1950–80 period, the growth of the middle classes to a substantial size between 100 and 250 million, the exact number depending on where and on what criteria one draws the cut-off point, has fundamentally changed the social structure of Indian society. From a social structure characterized by a sharp contrast between a small elite and a large impoverished mass, Indian society has shifted to being one with substantial intermediate classes. The first type of social structure supported a broadly socialistic ideology, while the second type has created a mass base for capitalism and liberalization.[1]

The debate centred on the middle class has focused on the size of this class (whether it is, say, 50 million or 150 million or 250 million), and the criteria to be used in drawing boundaries. This essay focuses on a criterion that is politically more salient: the sectoral and occupational composition of the middle classes — whether they are largely in the broadly defined public sector, the (entirely private) agricultural sector, or the non-agricultural private sector. My hypothesis is that the orientation of the middle classes towards economic liberalization, especially towards continued or 'second-generation' economic reforms involving the privatization of public enterprises, reduction of the scope of the government, and

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[1] See, for example, Atul Kohli's (1989) argument that the growth of the number of shareholders in India provides a mass base for capitalism.

desubsidization of a range of activities and interest groups, depends on two factors: (*i*) the magnitude of the public-sector component, and the publicly subsidized component, of the middle classes; and (*ii*) how this component is being affected by these reforms. Public-sector employment in India means total job security and publicly determined, not market-determined, pay scales. Public-sector employees have a vested interest in the size and scope of the state and in the periodically increased public-sector wages. Similarly, nearly all of the better-off agrarian population has a vested interest in a variety of central and state-level subsidies, including those relating to fertilizers, electricity, water, and credit. Thus, these two segments of the middle classes have vested interests that militate against fiscal-stabilization measures such as downsizing, public-sector wage restraints, central- and state-level desubsidization, and structural changes like privatization, with consequential implications for continued reform. Their attitude can largely be expected to be oriented towards the benefits of liberalization while being unprepared to accept the painful but inevitable costs of the process. This is not to say that all segments of the non-agricultural private-sector middle classes can be expected to be pro-liberalization. Non-competitive segments, such as those in sick industries or protected industries, could well be opposed, while groups employed in other sectors have much to gain from continued liberalization.

Theories of the middle classes and India's political economy

There is a vast conceptual, theoretical and empirical literature on class and class structure, both Marxist and non-Marxist, that deals with the 'middle classes' or the 'intermediate strata' in capitalist societies (Bechhofer and Elliott 1981; Johnson 1982, 1985; Wright 1985). I do not attempt to summarize it here. There is also a considerable body of literature, overwhelmingly Marxist, on the class analysis of Indian society, which too I shall not summarize. However, there is very little on the Indian middle classes, particularly in the context of the post-1991 economic liberalization period. In the approach to this essay, I will selectively refer only to the main points in the debate on the 'middle classes' in the general literature on class that may be usefully be applied to the Indian context. Likewise, I only refer to developments in the Indian literature on class and class structure that refer to the 'middle classes' or the 'intermediate strata', and which are of relevance to understanding the relationship between the middle classes and economic liberalization since 1991.

But who are the middle classes? How does one define them? The Marxian category of class, to begin with the paradigm which gives it central importance, defines class in relation to ownership of the means of production. In capitalist societies, the core classes are those of capitalists and workers, that is, the owners of the means of production and those who sell their labour power to the former for a wage. The only other class significant in the Marxian schema, aside from the landlords and peasants, is the petty bourgeoisie, an intermediate stratum of small producers and proprietors, typically shopkeepers, independent artisans and small manufacturers. But while the Marxian schema may be heuristically useful for certain purposes, it is of limited use for the empirical analysis of the class structure of societies, particularly in developing countries. For since the middle of the 19th century, the growth of capitalism, dependent on science and technology, and the growth of regulatory state apparatuses has meant the growth of an intermediate strata in white-collar occupations and professions, both salaried and self-employed, particularly the former, characterized by increasing degrees of education, and as a class which is intermediate in income between capitalists and manual workers. The middle classes have not only become a large fraction of the population in capitalist societies, but are the classes which throw up intellectuals and politicians, and thus play an important political and ideological role. Their importance grows as economies the world over, including developing economies, shift towards the services sector, in terms of both the share of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and employment.

Erik Olin Wright did not consider the middle class a true class but a 'contradictory location within class relations' (Wright 1985: 19, 24–57). In a detailed analysis of the horizontal fractionation and vertical layering of the middle classes, he argued that the 'new middle class' of professionals and white-collar workers differed from the 'old middle class', or petty bourgeoisie of small independent producers and shopkeepers, in that the latter shares the surplus produced by the working class and accruing to the capitalist class, because of their control of scarce knowledge and skills and their supervisory role in the labour process. However, they are also employees and sellers of mental labour power, and therefore exploited. For our purpose, what is useful is that the middle classes are highly fractionalized and layered and have a deeply contradictory relationship to capitalism, although they are largely allied to the capitalist classes.

Some scholars, writing about the middle classes in developing countries, emphasized their relative autonomy from the principal property-owning classes, the industrial bourgeoisie and the landowners, due to a combination of their control of the state and their possession of scarce skills. Aijaz Ahmad argued that

> far from being mere 'agents' of the ruling classes or a mere 'vacillating mass' . . . the intermediate and auxiliary classes of the periphery occupy a strategic field in the economy and politics of their countries, thus obtaining power and initiatives which make it possible for them to struggle for political dominance over other classes, including the bourgeoisie. (Ahmad 1985: 44)

Here, Ahmad is referring to the sections of the middle class that play a role in politics. As for the traditional or 'old middle class' or petty bourgeoisie in developing countries, especially at the lower end of the scale, it can be argued, as Chris Gerry and Chris Birkbeck (1981) have done, that the petty commodity producer is a proletarian in disguise. Pranab Bardhan also shared the view that the middle classes or 'professionals', including all white-collar workers, are one of the 'dominant proprietary classes' on the basis of their possession of human capital in the form of education and skills, especially those in the state apparatus, who have a rentier role in the control of state decisions on disbursements and patronage (Bardhan 1994: 51).

The classic work on the historical development of the Indian middle classes remains that of B. B. Misra (1960), though it is not useful for our purpose in this essay. Satish Deshpande (2003), while discussing possible alternative definitions of the middle class in the Indian context, privileged both cultural capital and the middle classes' role in the developmental state and, historically, in the ruling Congress party. While emphasizing the highly differentiated character of the middle classes (including linguistic, English–non-English speaking, differentiation), he stated that cultural capital may consist of identities (caste, community, region) or competences (educational credentials, linguistic and other social skills), and that it has three attributes of property — tangible and psychological benefits; the ability to exclude others; and transmissibility across generations. Referring to Gramsci, Deshpande argued that the main function of the middle classes is to build hegemony, and further, that the elite fraction of the middle class specializes in the production of ideologies, while its mass fraction 'engages in the exemplary consumption of ideologies thus investing them with social legitimacy' (ibid.: 141). These ideas are potentially useful in analyzing the growing legitimacy of economic liberalization as a policy paradigm and also, perhaps, of the Hindutva ideology and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) as a political party (see also Hasan 2001; Palshikar 2001).

Ashok Rudra (1989), in a Marxian framework, conceived of the 'intelligentsia', along with industrial capitalists and landlords, as a 'ruling' class. He defined the intelligentsia, generally meaning non-manual labourers, as consisting of the following groups or strata:

- all white-collar workers in the organized private sector, including clerks, but excluding peons (messengers), drivers and sweepers
- all public servants from the top to lower-division clerks, excluding Group D of public-sector employees (peons, sweepers, etc.)
- teachers, doctors, lawyers, engineers, architects, and nurses in the organized sector or private practice
- writers, journalists, artists, advertising and entertainment industry professionals in both sectors and the self-employed
- professionals, politicians and trade-union leaders

All of these categories belong to the 'intelligentsia' and share in the surplus produced by direct producers. The members of the intelligentsia all belong to the middle classes, but not all the latter belong to the former. This last point is somewhat cryptic, but one assumes that in stating this Rudra was referring to the 'old middle class' or petty bourgeoisie of small shopkeepers and artisans, perceived as belonging to the middle classes, but not to the intelligentsia.

Pranab Bardhan objected to the use of the term 'intelligentsia', considering them instead a ruling class (Bardhan 1989). His 'professionals' generally match Rudra's five types of non-manual workers. Bardhan's framework conceived of state power as being dominated by a coalition of three dominant proprietary classes — the industrial capitalists, the rich farmers and the 'professionals (both civilian and military), including white-collar workers'. Bardhan's definition of professionals appears to be restricted to professionals in the public bureaucracy; he explained in a footnote: 'I have kept a conceptual distinction between white-collar workers in the public bureaucracy (which I include among the proprietary classes in civil society) and the political leadership representing the state (sometimes I have referred to it as the "state elite")' (Bardhan 1994: 51). However, in work following his original use of the term 'professionals' in Bardhan (1994 [1984]), he clarified that his definition of professionals included all white-collar workers, not just those in the public bureaucracy (Bardhan 1989). The basis for including professionals as one of the dominant proprietary classes was their possession of human capital in the form of education, skills and technical expertise. The economic interests of this class, particularly state professionals, lay in maintaining the state's economic empire for rent-extraction. Public policy was driven by the internal conflicts within this coalition, with each of the proprietary classes being able to defend its own interests without prevailing over the others. The result was protection (for import-substituting industrialists), subsidies (for all segments of the ruling coalition and food subsidies for the poor), overregulation, and a bloated public sector (for the state professionals). The politics of competitive rent-seeking and populism pre-empted deregulation and growth-complementing infrastructural investment, had a deficitary logic, retarded growth, and implied a deteriorating conflict-management mechanism.

Bardhan's work was a late offshoot of the debate on slow industrial growth in India since the mid-1960s. As far as the relationship between economic liberalization and the middle classes was concerned, in Bardhan's framework, public enterprises were used to distributing patronage such as contracts and jobs, raising political finance, and were generally subjected to rent-seeking activities by the professionals, from politicians down to white-collar workers. The net result was both fiscal deficits and slow and inefficient growth.

Bardhan's political sociology was a modification of Marxism, one that incorporated insights from neoclassical political economy. His coalition of dominant proprietary classes sounded Marxian, but in his scheme of things policy outcomes were the result of the internal conflicts of this coalition, rather than of class struggle between the exploiting and exploited classes. The dominant coalition included not only the bourgeois–landlord alliance but also professionals, including white-collar workers, in the public sector as one of the dominant proprietary classes in themselves, with their own corporate class interests, distinct from, and to some extent conflicting with, those of industrialists and landlords. Bardhan argued that there was, at the beginning of the 1991 reform period, greater overlap and 'increasing social and economic interpenetration' between the rich farmers and the urban industrial and professional classes, as well as between all of these and non-resident Indians, which led to reduced conflict within the dominant coalition (Bardhan 1989: 156; see also Bardhan 1992). He also argued that '[a]lmost all of this so-called "middle class" . . . belongs to the top two deciles, if not the top decile, of the income pyramid. Its members certainly belong to different parts of what I have described earlier as the three dominant classes in India' (Bardhan 1992: 333).

Both these were departures from the traditional Marxian model in the direction of liberal–pluralist interest group theory and neo-classical political economy. For the state, in Bardhan's analysis, was not merely relatively autonomous in Poulantzas' sense (1973: 256–74) and structurally constrained but standing above the fractions of the dominant class(es) and managing public policy in the interest of 'capital as a whole'. Its personnel were a proprietary class in themselves, based on their possession of relatively scarce (in the Indian context) human capital in the form of education and by way of de facto possession of public capital assets. Their interest was to maximize rents from discretionary controls which constrained, and to some extent militated against, both industrial capitalist and land-owning interests.

Atul Kohli (1989) assigned the origins of the liberalizing impulse in the late 1980s to Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and his inner circle of advisors, and not to the supporting groups, of which he identified two — business groups and the middle classes. Of the former group, he argued that the business community of India had tended to react to rather than lead economic policy. Its power was closer to being one of veto than of agenda-setting. There was middle-class support for liberalization, Kohli argued, because it offered them concrete benefits such as direct tax reduction and more consumer goods. Kohli also noted an emerging structural link between the growing middle classes and big business via the booming capital market, as business increasingly financed itself by raising capital from the public. Big business thus acquired a mass social base, while the middle class acquired a stake in corporate profitability.

The literature since 1991 indicates a shift from state-driven to society-driven reforms. E. Sridharan (1993), in a state-centric rather than society-centric analysis, argued that all liberalization initiatives had originated not from the business community but from the top political leadership, and the former had merely reacted to it, largely supportive so long as the initiatives did not threaten them with foreign competition. Vanita Shastri (1997) also focused on the elite policy circle. Jorgen Dige Pedersen (2000) argued that the reforms were society-led in that the business community had been reconfigured and led by a new breed of entrepreneurs with an interest in reform. However, this work still focused on groups which would form a thin upper stratum, though outside the state.

Subsequently, Arun Shourie, as Minister for Disinvestment, Communications and Information Technology in the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government, made the same point about the 'society'-drivenness of reform in another way:

> Reforms are not the whim or fancy of some individuals. They are dictated by the compulsions that our polity and economy face on the one side and are propelled by the opportunities that have opened up on the other . . . Indeed, one Reform creates pressure that other Reforms be put through. Import–export licensing is abolished. Trade increases. Traders and manufacturers demand that ports be improved so that turn-around time comes down to Singapore levels, that the DGFT [Directorate-General of Foreign Trade] accepts electronic filing of forms.[2]

The tone and tenor of the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) election campaign in 2004, with its 'India Shining' and 'feel-good' slogans, seemed aimed at the middle classes, whose support for both reforms and the BJP seemed to be assumed.

Ashutosh Varshney (1999) distinguished between elite politics and mass politics, but focused on identity politics in the latter sphere, arguing that economic reforms largely remained an elite affair, while mass politics was driven by communal and caste passions. There was no detailed discussion on the growth of the middle classes per se and the implications of this growth for the politics of economic reform in any of these analyses.

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[2] Arun Shourie, 'When Spirit is Willing, Flesh has a Way', *Indian Express*, 4 February 2004.

At the end of this theoretical discussion, we are still left with considerable theoretical and conceptual ambiguity about the middle classes. I, therefore, adopt a pragmatic and eclectic definition (admittedly arbitrary) combining income levels with non-manual occupational status, following André Béteille's position (2001) that occupational function and employment status are the two most significant criteria for defining the middle-classes, although education and income are also widely used. The most important occupational division is between manual and non-manual work, with typical middle-class occupations being non-manual ones. This would also roughly agree with Rudra's definition of the intelligentsia, except that I include the self-employed 'old middle class' or petty bourgeoisie of shopkeepers, artisans and small businessmen above a certain income level. Therefore, we need an income cut-off level that would include all non-manual workers, even if it includes some manual workers.

Estimating shifts in the size and composition of the middle classes in India

My definition is constrained by the availability of data and therefore I have adjusted my definition to fit the best available data for such an exercise, viz., the Market Information Survey of Households (MISH) data set of the National Council for Applied Economic Research (NCAER). This data set is more appropriate for our purpose than the National Sample Survey (NSS) data based on consumption; it is more appropriate for estimating middle-class size as income-distribution data are better for this purpose than consumption data, though consumption of durables and consumables is extremely well covered by the MISH too.[3] Also, the MISH provided data based on very large samples of 300,000 (compared to 120,000 of NSS), on both income distributions and occupational distributions over time since 1985–86, in a form that makes comparisons of income distribution across time possible:

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[3] Lal, Mohan and Natarajan (2001) compared the MISH and NSS data with respect to the debate on the post-reform decline of poverty, and argued that NSS data in the 1990s was less reliable and greatly overstated poverty.

> Households are classified into five income groups, namely, low, lower-middle, middle, upper-middle and high. Since the income data are collected at current prices, the cut-off points of each income group for each year are adjusted to allow for inflation so that they are comparable over time. Thus, these surveys provide comparable income distributions at different points of time. Such a unique data set is not available from any other source. (NCAER 2003: 5)

Another important point is that since the MISH surveys accounted for approximately 70 per cent of the GDP, survey incomes turned out to be less than the national income estimated by the Central Statistical Organization (CSO).

> The reason for this is that the CSO uses the economic concept of income, which includes imputed incomes, unrealised accruals, etc., while estimating the GDP. In surveys, on the other hand, the respondents report what they consider to be their income. Also, in surveys, income is invariably understated. This, however, does not underestimate the importance or usefulness of the MISH data. MISH surveys use the same method to estimate the household income and the underlying income distribution. The trends are therefore likely to be reliable. (NCAER 2003: 5)

One limitation that needs to be noted is that the five income groups used were not quintiles from bottom to top, but were based on arbitrary cut-off points. This constrained me to work with these arbitrary cut-offs-based income groups to estimate the middle class, although I combined the MISH data with other data in an eclectic manner. However, these five income classes very roughly lent themselves to this exercise.

This essay estimates the size and growth of the middle class in the post-reform (post-1991) period by merging the MISH data with other sources of data, primarily data on organized-sector employment, particularly public employment. My attempt is not merely to attempt to estimate the growth of the middle classes in horizontal income slabs using this data, but also to try to divide the horizontal income slabs into sectoral occupational categories such as the public-sector middle class, the non-agricultural private-sector middle class, including its self-employed components, and the agricultural middle class, to the extent that such mergers of data are feasible.

There has been very little systematic work on the Indian middle classes despite the general feeling that the middle classes have increased in their thickness as strata. An alternative to Marxian classifications based on relations to the means of production, elaborated in great complexity by Wright, was to look at the middle classes in terms of income classes, or income-cum-occupation defined classes, beginning from the top, thereby working with categories broadly similar in principle to Rudra's intelligentsia, and endorsed by Bardhan. In other words, the alternative was to view them as intermediate income groups in non-manual occupations, situated between a tiny rich upper class and a majority of low-income and manual occupation groups. This was admittedly extremely ambiguous and everything depended on theoretically- or policy-determined cut-off points for classification.

The MISH data-derived distribution of households by five income groups (Tables 2.1 and 2.2) provided the following picture of the growth of the income-defined middle class: the MISH data set's arbitrary cut-offs, which I was constrained to work with, divided the population of 171.921 million households in 1998–99 into five income groups (in rupees per annum) on the basis of the income reported by the respondent head of household:

High (Above ₹ 140,000)
Upper Middle (₹ 105,001–₹ 140,000)
Middle (₹ 70,001–₹ 105,000)
Lower Middle (₹ 35,001–₹ 70,000)
Lower (up to ₹ 35,000)

Based on this classification, I differentiated between three ways of conceiving of the middle class:

- Elite middle class (i.e., including the very rich) — this corresponded to the High income group mentioned earlier.
- Expanded middle class — this corresponded to the High and Upper Middle income groups mentioned earlier.
- Broadest middle class — this corresponded to the High, Upper Middle and Middle income groups mentioned earlier.

Table 2.1: Estimated Distribution of Households by Income Groups (in percentage)

Annual income (₹) (at 1998–99 prices)	*1989–90*	*1992–93*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*
Urban					
Up to 35,000 (L)	37.14	38.44	24.46	21.87	18.96
35,001–70,000 (LM)	34.76	32.97	34.69	34.42	33.76
70,001–105,000 (M)	17.89	16.07	21.33	22.11	22.59
105,001–140,000 (UM)	6.46	7.62	10.55	11.29	12.16
Above 140,000 (H)	3.75	4.90	8.98	10.30	12.53
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
Broadest Middle Class (M+UM+H)	28.10	28.59	40.86	43.70	47.28
Expanded Middle Class (UM+H)	10.21	12.52	19.53	21.59	24.69
Elite Middle Class (H)	3.75	4.90	8.98	10.30	12.53
Total no. of households ('000)	40,106	42,114	47,375	48,161	49,111
Rural					
Up to 35,000 (L)	67.34	65.49	52.80	50.69	47.94
35,001–70,000 (LM)	23.89	22.61	31.79	33.17	34.83
70,001–105,000 (M)	7.07	8.22	9.54	9.87	10.41
105,001–140,000 (UM)	1.16	2.30	3.44	3.61	3.85
Above 140,000 (H)	0.54	1.37	2.43	2.65	2.97
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
Broadest Middle Class (M+UM+H)	8.77	11.89	15.41	16.13	17.23
Expanded Middle Class (UM+H)	1.70	3.67	5.87	6.26	6.82
Elite Middle Class (H)	0.54	1.37	2.43	2.65	2.97
Total no. of households ('000)	102,334	113,203	119,289	121,046	122,810
Total					
Up to 35,000 (L)	58.84	58.16	44.75	42.49	39.66
35,001–70,000 (LM)	26.95	25.42	32.61	33.53	34.53
70,001–105,000 (M)	10.11	10.35	12.89	13.35	13.89
105,001–140,000 (UM)	2.66	3.74	5.46	5.80	6.22
Above 140,000 (H)	1.44	2.33	4.29	4.83	5.70
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
Broadest Middle Class (M+UM+H)	14.21	16.42	22.64	23.98	25.81
Expanded Middle Class (UM+H)	4.10	6.07	9.75	10.63	11.92
Elite Middle Class (H)	1.44	2.33	4.29	4.83	5.70
Total no. of households ('000)	142,440	155,317	166,664	169,207	171,921

Source: NCAER (2003: 123).

Note: L=Low Income, LM=Lower Middle Income, M=Middle Income, UM=Upper Middle Income, H=High Income.

Table 2.2: Estimated Distribution of Households by Income Groups (in millions)

Annual income (₹) (at 1998–99 prices)	*1989–90*	*1992–93*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*
Urban					
Up to 35,000 (L)	83.414	90.656	64.892	58.984	52.144
35,001–70,000 (LM)	78.069	77.756	92.033	92.831	92.847
70,001–105,000 (M)	40.180	37.899	56.588	59.631	62.127
105,001–140,000 (UM)	14.509	7.620	27.989	30.449	33.443
Above 140,000 (H)	8.422	11.556	23.824	27.779	34.460
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
Broadest Middle Class (M+UM+H)	63.111	57.075	108.402	117.860	130.030
Expanded Middle Class (UM+H)	22.931	19.176	51.813	58.229	67.903
Elite Middle Class (H)	8.422	11.556	23.824	27.779	34.460
Total no. of households	40.106	42.114	47.375	48.161	49.111
Rural					
Upto 35,000 (L)	385.906	415.165	352.714	343.606	329.701
35,001–70,000 (LM)	136.907	143.333	212.363	224.845	239.538
70,001–105,000 (M)	40.516	52.110	63.729	66.905	71.593
105,001–140,000 (UM)	6.648	14.581	22.980	24.471	26.478
Above 140,000 (H)	3.095	8.685	16.233	17.963	20.426
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
Broadest Middle Class (M+UM+H)	50.258	75.375	102.942	109.338	118.497
Expanded Middle Class (UM+H)	9.742	23.265	39.213	42.434	46.904
Elite Middle Class (H)	3.095	8.685	16.233	17.963	20.426
Total no. of households	102.334	113.203	119.289	121.046	122.810
Total					
Upto 35,000 (L)	469.345	505.861	417.660	402.618	381.830
35,001–70,000 (LM)	214.970	221.097	304.355	317.717	332.440
70,001–105,000 (M)	80.644	90.022	120.305	126.499	133.727
105,001–140,000 (UM)	21.218	32.530	50.959	54.958	59.884
Above 140,000 (H)	11.486	20.266	40.039	45.767	54.877
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
Broadest Middle Class (M+UM+H)	113.348	142.817	211.303	227.225	248.488
Expanded Middle Class (UM+H)	32.704	52.795	90.999	100.726	114.761
Elite Middle Class (H)	11.486	20.266	40.039	45.767	54.877
Total no. of households	142.440	155.317	166.664	169.207	171.921

Source: NCAER (2003: 123).

Note: L=Low Income, LM=Lower Middle Income, M=Middle Income, UM=Upper Middle Income, H=High Income.

Tables 2.1 and 2.2 show that from 1989–90 to 1998–99, there were significant increases in the percentage and number of households in each of the three top categories overall, as well as in both the urban and rural components, combined with a decline in the percentage of households falling in the Lower income group, and in the Lower Middle income group (except for an increase in this category in rural areas). This was buttressed by data on the penetration of consumer durables in both urban and especially rural areas over the period (NCAER 2003: Chapter 5, Annexure 4).

However, even with these increases in incomes, the percentages of the population in the three upper-income groups (that is, in the broadest middle class), overall and in both rural and urban areas, remained in a minority. The great majority of the population, overall and in both rural and urban areas, fell in the lowest-two income groups. Thus, by 1998–99, the elite middle class was only 6 per cent, the expanded middle class was only 12 per cent, and the broadest middle class was only 26 per cent of the population. The remaining 74 per cent of the population fell below these levels in terms of income (Table 2.1). In other words, depending on how expansively the middle class is conceived, it consisted of 55 million people (the elite definition), 115 million people (the expanded definition) or 248 million people (the broadest definition) out of almost a billion in 1998–99 (Table 2.2).

Table 2.3: Distribution of Population into Income Classes by Household Head's Occupation in 1999–2000 (in millions)

Occupation	*L*	*LM*	*M*	*UM*	*H*	*All*
Housewife	2.86	3.42	1.87	0.86	0.52	9.53
Cultivator	113.57	108.15	39.49	18.35	16.87	296.43
Wage earner	173.02	104.00	25.87	3.32	1.41	307.62
Salary earner	29.24	65.28	47.30	25.92	28.38	196.12
Professional	0.96	2.58	3.65	3.91	4.34	15.44
Artisan	14.22	17.30	9.13	2.02	1.06	43.73
Petty shopkeeper	19.03	29.15	16.80	8.19	7.81	80.98
Businessman	0.06	0.62	3.22	4.56	5.34	13.80
Self employed sub-total	34.27	49.65	32.80	18.68	18.55	153.95
Others	6.59	7.63	5.34	2.99	2.40	24.95
Total	**359.55**	**338.13**	**152.67**	**70.12**	**68.13**	**988.60**

Source: Computed from NCAER (2003: 22), using a multiplier of 5.6 to convert households into people (176.535 million households would yield 988.596 million persons in 1998–99, compared to 1,027 million in the census of 2001).

Note: (1) L=Low Income, LM=Lower Middle Income, M=Middle Income, UM=Upper Middle Income, H=High Income.

(2) The numbers in boxes are those for the self-employed by income class.

Shifts in occupational composition in the period from 1989–90 to 1998–99 were not dramatic (Table 2.4). The most significant change was the fall in cultivator (by definition, self-employed cultivators in agriculture) households from 38 per cent to 30 per cent of all households, and the rise in wage-earner households from

Table 2.4: Estimated Distribution of Households by Occupation (in percentage)

Occupation	*1989–90*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1998–99*
Urban				
Housewife	0.98	1.07	0.96	0.88
Cultivator	5.79	3.39	3.47	3.54
Wage earner	18.37	20.74	20.77	20.87
Salary earner	39.91	40.69	40.51	40.64
Professional	3.92	3.42	3.55	3.31
Artisan	6.87	7.01	7.08	6.77
Petty shopkeeper	15.33	15.92	15.96	16.68
Businessman	4.13	3.46	3.63	3.77
Others	4.70	4.30	4.08	3.53
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
Total no. of households ('000)	40,106	46,699	47,375	48,750
Rural				
Housewife	0.63	1.12	1.07	1.04
Cultivator	50.52	41.02	40.86	40.89
Wage earner	26.45	35.30	35.23	35.22
Salary earner	9.86	11.11	11.20	11.26
Professional	1.01	0.64	0.70	0.72
Artisan	3.20	3.45	3.51	3.44
Petty shopkeeper	5.37	4.86	4.95	4.99
Businessman	0.81	0.37	0.43	0.44
Others	2.15	2.13	2.03	2.00
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
Total no. of households ('000)	102,335	118,173	119,290	122,810
Total				
Housewife	0.73	1.11	1.04	0.99
Cultivator	37.93	30.36	30.23	30.28
Wage earner	24.18	31.18	31.12	31.15
Salary earner	18.32	19.49	19.53	19.61
Professional	1.83	1.43	1.51	1.45
Artisan	4.23	4.46	4.53	4.38
Petty shopkeeper	8.17	7.99	8.08	8.31
Businessman	1.74	1.24	1.34	1.39
Others	2.87	2.74	2.61	2.44
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
Total no. of households ('000)	142,441	164,872	166,665	171,560

Source: NCAER (2003: 147).

24 per cent to 31 per cent. (The MISH survey made a distinction between wage earners and salary earners, the latter being paid a monthly or annual salary, the former presumably being paid in less than a month. However, it is important to remember that salary earners can be manual workers too.) This shift was particularly marked in rural areas, where cultivator households fell from 50 per cent to 41 per cent, and wage-earner households rose from 26 per cent to 35 per cent. However, the overwhelming bulk of this shift was outside the broadest middle class, i.e., in the Low and Lower Middle income groups.

As far as the largely non-manual broadest middle-class occupations, i.e., salary earners and self-employed categories (see Table 2.4), the shifts were relatively marginal. Salary-earner households increased from 18.32 per cent to 19.61 per cent over the period from 1989–90 to 1998–99, and the self-employed remained the same at 16 per cent. Even for urban areas, the shifts were marginal, if any, with salary earners increasing from 40 per cent to 41 per cent, and the self-employed remaining stable at just over 30 per cent. In fact, the percentages of professionals and of businessmen households in total households declined marginally (Table 2.4).

However, during 1999–2000, in the broadest middle class, the salary earners were 35 per cent, in the expanded middle class they were 39 per cent, and in the elite middle class they were 42 per cent (Table 2.3). Taking urban areas only, in the broadest middle class in 1999–2000, the salary earners were 49 per cent, in the expanded middle class they were 51 per cent, and in the elite middle class they were 54 per cent.[4]

The self-employed categories in 1999–2000 were 24 per cent of the broadest middle class, 27 per cent of the expanded middle class, and 27 per cent of the elite middle class (computed from Table 2.3; please note that the broadest middle class in 1999–2000 was 291 million compared to 248 million in 1998–99). Taking urban areas only, the self-employed categories in 1999–2000, were 34 per cent of the broadest middle class, 35 per cent of the expanded middle class, and 35 per cent of the elite middle class.[5] That is, the salary earners and the self-employed, in that order, dominated the top-three income categories, with the former constituting about half of the broadest urban middle class, and the self-employed over a third. However, it should also be noted that of the self-employed categories, the businessmen and the professionals, though much less in number than petty shopkeepers and artisans (the traditional petty bourgeoisie or old middle class), increased in percentage as one went up the ladder. Nearly three-quarters of the artisans and nearly 60 per cent of the petty shopkeepers were in the two lowest income groups, below the broadest middle class, and even in urban areas, the bulk of both these categories was below the broadest middle class.[6]

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[4] Computed from Table 4.3 in NCAER (2003: 22).

[5] Ibid.

To sum up, in 1999–2000, out of a broadest middle class of 291 million, salary earners (both manual and non-manual) totalled 102 million (35 per cent), the self-employed totalled 70 million (24 per cent), cultivators, the emerging agricultural middle class in the rural areas (which is not the same as the rural middle class, which was very disproportionately non-agricultural), totalled 75 million (26 per cent), and the rest, mostly wage earners, totalled 30 million (10 per cent).

It would appear that while the share of the salary earners and the self-employed in the elite middle class expanded and the broadest middle classes did not change much, what did change were their absolute numbers and their income levels over the period 1989–90. The question that arises is: Were these salary earners all non-manual? In that category, were they professional–managerial–technical or clerical workers? And how did these shares in the salary-earner category shift? Furthermore, how many of the non-manual salary earners were public employees, i.e., how large was the public-sector middle class by the income-cum-occupation (non-manual) criteria? Or alternatively, purely by the income criterion, how large was the public employee component of the broadest middle class?

According to National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) data (Table 2.5), the percentage of non-manual, i.e., the first three categories in Table 2.5 consisting of professional, technical and related workers; administrative, executive and managerial workers; and clerical and related workers, in that order, in total employment, increased from 1977–78, particularly in urban areas, and particularly over the period from 1987–88 to 1999–2000. These non-manual

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[6] Tables 3 and 4.3 in NCAER (2003: 22).

Table 2.5: Percentage Distribution of Total Employment by Occupation

	Rural					*Urban*				
Occupational division	*1977–78*	*1983*	*1987–88*	*1993–94*	*1999–2000*	*1977–78*	*1983*	*1987–88*	*1993–94*	*1999–2000*
Professional, technical and related workers	1.5	2.1	1.7	2.3	2.1	7.3	8.2	8.0	9.0	8.9
Administrative, executive and managerial workers	0.3	0.4	0.7	0.9	1.4	3.0	4.0	5.0	5.9	8.4
Clerical and related workers	0.9	1.2	1.3	1.4	1.5	10.2	9.9	10.2	9.7	9.2
Non-manual workers	2.7	3.7	3.7	4.6	5.0	20.5	22.1	23.2	24.6	26.5
Sales workers	3.1	3.3	3.9	4.2	4.1	16.3	15.8	16.8	17.0	16.7
Service workers	2.5	2.4	2.3	2.0	2.5	11.0	10.4	9.9	9.2	9.7
Farmers, fishermen and related workers	82.4	79.8	75.1	76.7	74.2	13.7	12.7	10.7	10.7	8.3
Production and related workers, transport equipment operators and labourers	9.3	10.8	12.7	12.4	14.2	38.5	39.1	38.5	38.7	38.9
Workers not classified by occupation	–	–	2.4	–	–	–	–	0.8	–	–
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total employment (in millions)	197.5	213.6	224.0	255.0	273.8	46.1	56.0	65.1	76.9	92.3

Source: IAMR (2001: 154).

Note: (a) Totals may not tally due to rounding off.
(b) This table is based on NSSO data provided by IAMR.

workers in urban areas increased from 20.5 per cent in 1977–78 to 23.2 per cent in 1987–88, and further to 26.5 per cent on 1999–2000. If one took the first (higher) two of the three categories of non-manual workers, i.e., excluding clerical and related workers, the increase in urban areas was sharper, moving up from 10.3 per cent in 1977–78, to 13 per cent in 1987–88, to 17.3 per cent in 1999–2000. In absolute numbers, this was impressive at over one-sixth of urban employment, at 15.97 million, or a maximum of 89 million persons in such households at the maximalist assumption that each such employee heads an independent household. If we were to deflate this by one-sixth, assuming that all these were in the organized sector and assuming that the one-sixth of the women employed in the organized sector (Table 2.7) all belonged to male-headed households, we would still arrive at a modern professional–managerial–technical middle class of 75 million (at 5.6 persons per household) in urban areas alone! Deflating by a quarter, we still get 67.5 million persons in such urban households! Adding clerical workers, for the period 1999–2000, we get 26.5 per cent in urban employment, which when deflated by a quarter brings us to a figure of 103 million persons in urban non-manual households, or approximately a little over a third of the urban population. This figure, it must be noted, is roughly consistent with the figures derived from the MISH survey data noted earlier to the effect that salary earners (but only if we assume them to be non-manual, which is definitely not the case) constitute 35 per cent of the broadest middle class, itself 26 per cent of the population in 1998–99, and 49 per cent of the broadest middle class in urban areas, itself 47 per cent of the urban population of 275 million, or 63 million, or about 23 per cent of the urban population. It appears that we will have to deflate the NSSO-derived figures by much more than a quarter by assuming that not only all women employees, but also many other employed family members lived in joint households, thus reducing the number of households before applying the multiplier of 5.6.

Because this essay is concerned with differences among middle-class groups in terms of their support for economic liberalization, and because my hypothesis is that it is the degree of reliance on the public sector (whether for direct employment or subsidies) that will best explain differing levels of support for liberalization, I must now, to come to the core of the essay, try to estimate the extent of the public-sector middle class. That is, what is the share of non-manual public-sector employees, broadly defined, in the middle class, especially in the broadest middle class? Employment data for the organized sector, consisting of all establishments in the public sector and non-agricultural private establishments employing 10 or more persons, indicate the following: Organized-sector employment at 28 million persons in 2000 was only 7–8 per cent of the total employment throughout 1973–2000 (Table 2.6), the bulk of total employment being agricultural employment, and a large part being small-scale industry employment that is not in the organized sector (though the larger small-scale factories, of over 10 employees, are in the organized sector).

Public-sector employment, which is, by definition, entirely in the organized sector, consistently dominated over private-sector employment in the organized sector (Table 2.7), being double the latter, if not more, since 1981. However, public-sector employment levelled off in the post-reform period — 19.057 million in 1990–91 to 18.773 million in 2001–02, after peaking at 19.559 million in 1996–97. This decline was largely due to recruitment freezes and Voluntary Retirement Schemes in public enterprises, not due to layoffs, privatization or their closures. Private employment in the organized sector, on the other hand, increased slightly from 7.676 million in 1990–91 to 8.432 million in 2001–02, decreasing after peaking at 8.748 million in 1997–98. In a country having the size of labour force as in India, these shifts in both organized private

Table 2.6: Employment in Organized and Unorganized Sectors

	Employment (in millions)			*Organized as percentage of the total*
Year	*Organized*	*Unorganized*	*Total*	
1973	18.82	217.48	236.30	7.96
1978	21.24	249.46	270.70	7.85
1983	24.01	278.69	302.70	7.93
1988	25.71	296.29	322.00	7.99
1991	26.73	315.17	341.90	7.82
1994	27.38	344.72	372.10	7.36
2000	28.07	368.73	396.80	7.07

Source: IAMR (2001: 158).

Note: The organized sector includes all establishments in the public sector and non-agricultural private establishments employing 10 or more persons in the private sector. This table is based on NSSO and Directorate-General of Employment and Training's *Employment Review* data, various years, according to the source given here.

Table 2.7: Employment in the Organized Sector

	*Employment ** (in millions)*			
Year	*Public*	*Private*	*Total*	*Percentage of women employed to total*
1971	107.31	67.42	174.73	11.0
1981	154.84	73.95	228.79	12.2
1982	159.46	75.47	234.93	12.3
1983	164.57	75.52	240.09	12.5
1984	168.69	73.46	242.15	12.6
1985	172.70	73.09	245.79	12.9
1986	176.84	73.74	250.58	13.0
1987	180.24	73.64	253.88	13.2
1988	183.20	73.92	257.12	13.4
1989	185.09	74.53	259.62	13.6
1990	187.72	75.82	263.54	14.1
1991	190.57	76.76	267.33	14.1
1992	192.10	78.46	270.56	14.4
1993	193.26	78.51	271.77	14.8
1994	194.45	79.30	273.75	15.2
1995	194.66	80.59	275.25	15.4
1996	194.29	85.12	279.41	15.8
1997	195.59	86.86	282.45	16.4
1998	194.18	87.48	281.66	16.9
1999	194.15	86.98	281.13	17.2
2000	193.14	86.46	279.60	17.8
2001	191.38	86.52	277.90	
2002	187.73	84.32	272.05	

Source: IAMR (2001: 159).
** Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Lakshadweep are not covered under the Employment Market Information (EMI) Programme.

Note: This table is based on Directorate-General of Employment and Training's *Employment Review* data, various years, provided in IAMR (2001).

and public employment were marginal (for a break-up of public employment in the post-reform period into central government, state governments, quasi-government [central and state public enterprises, universities and autonomous bodies], and local bodies [municipalities and panchayats], see Table 2.8). An additional point is that public employment here does not include employment in the armed forces, which totalled 1.3 million, the great bulk of about 1.1 million being in the army, of whom the vast majority were soldiers, only a relatively small minority being officers.

Table 2.8: Estimated Employment in Public and Private Sectors (in thousands)

	Public sector							
			Quasi government					
Year	*Central government*	*State government*	*Central*	*State*	*Local bodies*	*Total public sector*	*Private sector*	*Total employment*
1990–91	3,410	7,113	3,564	2,658	2,313	19,058	7,675	26,733
1991–92	3,428	7,190	3,554	2,839	2,198	19,209	7,846	27,055
1992–93	3,383	7,293	3,592	2,898	2,160	19,326	7,850	27,176
1993–94	3,392	7,337	3,566	2,948	2,202	19,445	7,930	27,375
1994–95	3,395	7,355	3,574	2,946	2,197	19,467	8,058	27,525
1995–96	3,366	7,414	3,538	2,920	2,192	19,430	8,511	27,941
1996–97	3,295	7,485	3,586	2,950	2,244	19,560	8,685	28,245
1997–98	3,253	7,458	3,536	2,925	2,246	19,418	8,748	28,166
1998–99	3,313	7,458	3,472	2,914	2,259	19,416	8,698	28,114
1999–2000	3,273	7,460	3,413	2,913	2,255	19,314	8,646	27,960
2000–01	3,261	7,425	3,291	2,901	2,261	19,139	8,652	27,791
2001–02	3,195	7,384	3,195	2,824	2,175	18,773	8,432	27,205

Source: CSO (1999: 5; 2003: 5); GoI (2005: S-49, S-50).

Note: (a) Totals may not tally due to rounding off; (b) central-government employment does not include the defence services.

The question that now arises, as far as the estimation of the middle class is concerned, is: what was the composition of public and private organized-sector employment? How much of this was non-manual? How much of this was professional–managerial–technical? And have these categories, which one could be certain would fall in the broadest middle class at least, increased in share? And, more importantly, what was the share of non-manual public-sector employees in the middle class?

One way of arriving at a rough estimate of non-manual public-sector employees is to exclude public-sector employees in Group D (peons, drivers, sweepers, etc.) for the manual nature of their work, and their hence not being middle-class by the income-cum-occupation criteria a la Rudra, Béteille and Bardhan, although purely by the income criterion, many of these households, if they have several earning members, would be in the broadest middle class, at the least. It is important to add here that by the self-identification criteria, Group D or manual employees may also be identified as middle-class because they were sharply aware of the vast numbers below them in society; for example, in conversations with me, peons and police constables identified themselves as middle-class. However, I have no data on self-identification in general, and have limited myself to the income-cum-non-manual occupational criteria in this exercise. I have included only public-sector employees in Groups A, B and C, the last being clerical and, hence, white-collar workers. In central-government employment, 28 per cent were Group D employees.[7] The bulk of central-government employees (65 per cent) fell in the clerical Group C category. Only a mere 6.65 per cent were in the executive–managerial–technical Groups A and B. In the government as a whole, this figure would be even less since the central government is relatively top-heavy. Assuming a similar distribution in the private sector, or an even more manual composition, this casts doubt on Table 2.5's figure of 17.3 per cent employees being in the top two occupational categories in 1999–2000, and 10 per cent as far back as 1977–78. Including only the Group A, B and C categories by taking 72 per cent of the central-government employment in 1998–99 (to match the MISH data), we get 2.385 million central-government public employees. There are no ready figures to give us a state-wise break-up of employees of state governments, quasi-governments (central and state), which includes public enterprises and autonomous bodies like universities, and local bodies into Groups A to D. However, in central public-sector enterprises, which in 1998–99 employed 1.9 million of the 3.47 million central quasi-government employees, the managerial and clerical workers amounted to only 30 per cent, the rest being highly skilled, skilled and unskilled workers (highly skilled workers, though manual, may well be in the broadest middle class by the income criterion alone). If one eliminated 70 per cent of the central public-sector employees, assuming likewise for state public enterprises, extended this assumption to the whole state quasi-government sector, assumed the same 28 per cent share for Group D in the central quasi-government sector other than public enterprises, and assumed a 50 per cent share of Group D in local bodies, then from Table 2.8 we arrive at, for 1998–99, 11.459 million non-manual public employees.[8] Assuming that the 17 per cent women employees were evenly distributed among Groups A, B, C, and D, and assuming that each of them was part of a male-headed household, not necessarily in public employment, we get 9.5 million non-manual public-sector employee households or over 53 million people.

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[7] See Table 6, Ministry of Labour, Directorate General of Employment and Training, *Census of Central Government Employees, 2003*, p. 7.

How many of these would fall into the broadest middle class? Using the pay-scale for the lowest non-manual category of Group C employees following the Fifth Pay Commission report, at the bottom of the scale of ₹ 3,200 basic pay, plus two increments of ₹85 by 1998–99, plus 30 per cent house rent allowance, plus city compensatory allowance and travelling allowance, the total emoluments came to ₹ 4,781 per month, or ₹ 57,372 per annum, at the bottom of the scale. Actually, this was not the bottom of the scale, but I used it because some technical/skilled workers in the scale had to be eliminated to keep to the non-manual criterion of middle-classness. For this problematic issue of non-manual character and skilled workers, I used a rough approximation to apply this cut-off on the scale.[9] This would mean that the overwhelming majority of Group C public-sector employees, especially if there is more than one earner in a household (joint families being the norm even in urban India as one goes down the income ladder), would be in the 1998–99 MISH–derived definition of the broadest middle class, constituting 26 per cent of the population and 47 per cent of the urban population in 1998–99 (Table 2.1). If one deflated the roughly estimated 9.5 million non-Group D public employee households by a quarter to eliminate female-headed and some additional households to get, say, 7.13 million households headed by non-manual public-sector employees, we arrive at 40 million non-manual public employees in 1998–99, excluding those in the armed forces, or about a sixth of the broadest middle class of 248 million. Assuming that the ratio of non-manual employees is the same in the organized private sector and applying the ratio of two-thirds public employees in the organized sector, we get 60 million people in the organized sector non-manual households. This would make public-sector employees and non-manual private-sector employees, taken together, about 24 per cent of the broadest middle class of 248 million in 1998–99. This is a much smaller figure than one would expect from the calculations based on NSSO figures on occupational composition mentioned earlier, of 103 million public-cum-private urban non-manual employees alone, and 160 million overall, since public-sector employment is over two-thirds of the organized sector employment. I probably underestimated the number of non-manual public-sector employees by eliminating too large a share for Group D and too small a share for Group C outside of the central government, and/or the NSSO percentage estimates of non-manual employment, particularly in urban areas, was much too high, particularly of the professional–managerial category, since these were much higher than Groups A and B in central government and hence in the government as a whole.

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[8] For making this assumption, I drew upon information from the Institute of Social Sciences, New Delhi, which specializes in local government. My assumption, in turn, was based on the fact that (urban) municipalities, not Panchayats (rural local bodies), dominated local bodies, and in the former about 60 per cent of the employees would be in Group D. There are no consolidated figures for employment in local bodies or a break-up by Groups A to D. Taking local bodies as a whole, I used an estimate of 50 per cent for Group D.

Those who were not public- and private-sector non-manual employees in the broadest middle class of 248 million were either self-employed or the better-off agriculturists or manual workers, public or private, including Group D public-sector employees. The 24 per cent of the broadest middle class which was self-employed totalled around 62 million persons. Taken together with the estimated 40 million non-manual public-sector employees, the total number of non-agricultural, non-manual household members would rise to 102 million. The remaining 146 million in the broadest middle class of 248 million would be either agriculturists or, very importantly, a considerable number of Group D public employees, skilled manual workers (and soldiers) who may not be middle-class by the income-cum-occupation criteria of non-manual work, but would qualify by income alone. If, for example, out of 19.4 million public-sector employees plus 1.3 million defence services employees, or a total of 20.7 million, 15 million households, or about 84 million persons, including therefore a large portion of Group D, skilled manual workers in public enterprise and soldiers, were included in the broadest middle class, public-sector employees would amount to one-third of this class. In this case, eliminating the 62 million non-manual self-employed household members leaves us with 102 million farmers and others, including manual employees, public and private.

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[9] See Government of India, Ministry of Finance, January 1997, *Report of the Fifth Central Pay Commission*, vol. 1, pp. 452–61.

Therefore, from the point of view of support for economic reforms, we need to estimate the share of public-sector employees and public subsidy-dependent farmers. Going by the above-mentioned estimates, the numbers of these two groups would total approximately from 144 million to 186 million, or 58 per cent to 75 per cent, of the 248 million broadest middle class. Thus, the majority of the broadest middle class would be persons whose livelihoods depend on state employment or state subsidies.

The caste composition and political leanings of the middle classes

Finally, we must examine the sociological composition, in terms of caste and, relatedly, the emerging political leanings, of the middle class in the post-1991 period, as these two parameters have an important bearing on the relationship of the middle class to economic liberalization. Historically, the very narrow middle class was almost entirely dominated by the traditional, i.e., 'twice-born', upper castes, especially outside south India. That has been changing, although the traditional upper castes still have a hugely disproportionate representation in the upper and middle classes, howsoever defined. As Deshpande pointed out, the Hindu upper castes accounted for 59 per cent of the top-most Monthly Per Capita Consumption Expenditure (MPCE) class in urban areas (₹ 1,950 or more), and 40 per cent in rural areas (₹ 950 or more), according to NSSO data for 1999–2000 (Deshpande 2003: 112–13). However, as D. L. Sheth (1999a, 1999b) commented, the new middle classes of the 1990s, as revealed by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) survey of 1996, were increasingly being constituted by non-traditional caste groups, particularly middle-caste, non-'twice born' farmer castes who would fit M. N. Srinivas's category of dominant castes. The middle class in the CSDS survey was defined (more restrictively than in my estimates from the MISH data) by five indicators: (*i*) respondents identifying themselves as middle-class; (*ii*) 10 years or more of schooling; (*iii*) residence in a brick-and-cement house; (*iv*) white-collar occupation; (*v*) ownership of at least three of the following four assets: car/jeep/tractor, scooter/motorcycle; television set; electrically operated water pump-set; and non-agricultural land. Twenty per cent of the CSDS's survey sample was identified as middle-class. It was found that while the upper castes (defined as the 'twice born' upper castes and the non-'twice born' dominant castes) were a quarter of the sample, they constituted nearly half of the middle class. However, this signified a reduction in the representation of the upper castes in the middle class, which was earlier almost totally dominated by them. The findings of the survey also represented a rise in the share of the non-'twice born' dominant castes, as well as of the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes or OBCs (lower castes) and religious minorities, which together constituted half the middle class and three-quarters of the sample.

As far as the emerging political leanings of the middle class were concerned, Yogendra Yadav, Sanjay Kumar and Oliver Heath argued that during the 1990s, there was a distinct shift in the political preferences of the upper and middle classes, as also of the upper castes — away from the Congress and towards the BJP. They argued that the BJP 'created a new social bloc, a new coalition of various social groups, that now lays claim to political power . . . The new social bloc is formed by the convergence of traditional caste–community differences and class distinctions . . . defined by an overlap of social and economic privileges'.[10] In 1999, according to the CSDS's post-poll survey, the BJP got 60 per cent of the upper-caste Hindu votes, 52 per cent of the votes of the dominant Hindu peasant castes such as Jats, Marathas, Patidars, Reddys and Kammas, which were not classified as OBCs, and less and less down the caste hierarchy. Likewise, the BJP's vote share was clearly related to class, its vote share falling linearly as one went down the ladder of economic status and educational attainment. The BJP's base, though spreading to rural areas, remained disproportionately urban. The new social bloc leaning towards the BJP largely comprised upper castes and dominant castes, who also made up a disproportionately large part of the upper-income groups.

Mirroring Sheth's and Yadav, Kumar & Heath's survey data from the elections of 1996, 1998 and 1999, Radhika Desai (2002) argued that in the more prosperous states there was an emerging top-middle convergence of interests and political preferences between the traditional upper castes and the rising dominant peasant castes, particularly in western and southern India. This explained the powerful social bloc behind the BJP in Gujarat and the support of the dominant caste-based regional parties for the NDA, led by the BJP, through the worst communal riots of 2002. 'The greater the economic fortunes of these middle castes, the more they tended to see the possibility of integration into Hindutva's predominantly upper caste/class fold as inviting' (ibid.: 146).

This evidence of a new social bloc, disproportionately upper-caste and upper-class, in support of the BJP and the BJP-led NDA coalition for essentially social reasons would seem to indicate that the largely upper- and dominant-caste middle classes, which overlapped very substantially with this bloc, would have tended to support the BJP-led NDA's economic-liberalization programme for reasons other than purely economic — in fact, may have supported the programme because they supported the BJP and/or its coalition for essentially social reasons. Therefore, the NDA was able to take a strong pro-reform line, as it did in the 2004 election campaign, because it could rely on this 'new social bloc' for social, i.e., caste-cum-class, reasons. In fact, the views of white-collar workers and those of BJP supporters on economic reforms were very mixed, with a significant section disapproving of various aspects of the reforms (S. Kumar 2004: Tables 2.1 and 2.5).

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[10] Yogendra Yadav, Sanjay Kumar and Oliver Heath, 'The BJP's New Social Bloc', *Frontline*, 19 November 1999, p. 32.

The CSDS post-poll survey data supported the middle-class character of the BJP despite its defeat in urban areas in 2004. In the cities which accounted for the predominantly urban constituencies, the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance parties won 43 per cent of the votes of the very poor, while the BJP-led NDA parties won just 25 per cent, while among the urban upper middle class, the NDA parties enjoyed a 14 per cent lead.[11] This underscores the proposition that support for economic reform among the middle class was not due to any ideological shift in favour of reform or any understanding of reform policies — the survey data showing very poor awareness and understanding of reform policies even among the middle class — but due to the class identification of the rich and the middle class with the BJP.

It would appear that the change in India's social structure from an elite-mass structure to one with a substantial middle-class presence emphasized the political vacuum in the centre-right after the demise of the Swatantra party in the 1970s. That is, there was no right-of-centre party specifically articulating the interests of the emerging middle class in a context where there was a sociological and political convergence between the top and the middle, like there is in most capitalist democracies, the Congress party being a catch-all party catering to the lower castes, the minorities and the poor. The BJP and its NDA allies seemed to have occupied this political space created by the emergence of the middle class in the past two decades, going beyond the BJP's narrow Hindu communal agenda, although by no means abandoning, at most temporarily downplaying, it.

If the recent (2004 pre-election) survey data indicating that the 18–24 age group was disproportionately inclined towards the BJP is correct, it would seem to indicate that, in a country where 60 per cent of the population is under 30, there is also an 'aspirational' middle class beyond the economically defined middle class, particularly among the young of all castes and classes.[12] This section, though it may fall below the middle class, does not share solidarity with the class into which it is born, but aspires to leave it behind and therefore identifies with classes, social groups, parties, and policies that seem to promise upward mobility. The middle class would, then, appear to have a wider socio-political and economic policy impact than its actual numbers suggest.

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[11] Yogendra Yadav, 'Urban India more Polarised', and 'Economic Reforms in the Mirror of Public Opinion', *The Hindu*, 13 June 2004.

[12] See opinion poll in *Outlook*, 15 March 2004.

Conclusion

I conclude, contrary to the case usually made, that while the growth of the middle classes is a development that does not explain liberalization itself, what it does explain is the particular character of liberalization since 1991, which I will call 'sustained gradualism'. This is in contrast to the spurts of liberalization following each International Monetary Fund (IMF) stand-by episode earlier (1957, 1966, 1973, 1981), which petered out very soon in the import-substitution industrialization regime (DeNoon 1998). The post-1991 liberalization, by contrast, has been sustained but, unlike in a whole range of countries, has been gradual to the point of being glacial, with the economy remaining one of the more closed economies, at least in terms of trade. This can perhaps be explained by, among other things, the growth of the broadest middle class since the 1980s, leading to the formation of a support base for liberalization while at the same time being constrained by the weight of public-sector employees and publicly-subsidized agriculturists in it.

Looking to the future, what are the implications of the relative size and composition of the middle class as estimated in this essay? If we categorize economic reform into three broad types of policies — deregulation, macroeconomic stabilization, and public-sector reform, including privatization — we can expect varying responses from different components of the middle class. Deregulation and macroeconomic stabilization are 'first generation' reforms, while public-sector reforms, including (centrally) privatization, are 'second generation' reforms. However, the backlog of 'first generation' reforms must also be considered part of the agenda of 'second generation reforms', and that backlog is considerable. The economy still remains fairly heavily regulated and fiscal stabilization remains to be achieved with the combined fiscal deficit of the centre and the states at over 10 per cent of GDP, which is where it was in 1990–91. As for public-sector reform and privatization, there has been only a marginal fall in total public-sector employment, largely due to recruitment freezes and Voluntary Retirement Schemes, and barely half a dozen central public enterprises have been truly privatized with government ownership falling below 50 per cent of equity.

Deregulation can be expected to command widespread support, as regulation is identified with corruption and inefficiency. Regional capital and medium-scale businesses would welcome deregulation, especially central deregulation. However, there is likely to be a contrary pull from the rising backward-caste component of the middle classes, who may not want to give up statist regulation for patronage, especially at the state level.

Macroeconomic stabilization would also bring forth mixed responses, particularly desubsidization. The urban middle class would tend to resist giving up high administered interest rates on the savings schemes of public-sector banks and financial institutions, and the rural rich would resist giving up subsidies to agriculture. Likewise, the removal of subsidies to higher public education would invite middle-class protest. On the closely related issue of public-sector reform and privatization, the public-employee component of the middle classes could be expected to resist downsizing and wage restraints, although it is possible that a snowballing support effect could occur after a certain point among those who are not laid off but who stand to gain in the increasingly privatized public enterprises, and among those whose family members gain from the growth of the private sector. All in all, given the largely public-employee and publicly subsidized farmer character of the broadest middle class, support for second-generation reforms of the desubsidization and privatization type can be expected to grow only very gradually.

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3

Hegemony and Inequality: Theoretical Reflections on India's 'New' Middle Class

Leela Fernandes

Over the past two decades, India's post-liberalization middle class has become a highly visible and much-debated social group.[1] Whether public commentators and academics have celebrated the rise of this middle class or have called attention to some of the negative social and cultural consequences of its changing role, such debates have identified a set of distinctive changes and characteristics that are associated with this post-liberalization class.[2] The 'newness' of this middle class lies in a set of discernible changes, such as shifting consumption patterns, changes in the labour market (with the growing significance of the new economy and private-sector employment and changing educational strategies associated with the post-liberalization labour market) and emerging forms of civic associational life in urban neighbourhoods, that have intensified since the implementation of economic reforms in the 1990s. However, despite the visibility of such changes, best embodied in discursive representations in the media and the public sphere, a closer analysis qualifies the apparent newness of the post-liberalization middle class. The visible changes associated with the new Indian middle class are tempered by the reworking of historically produced forms of inequality, such as those based on caste, gender, language and religion, that have continued to shape the relationship of this

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[1] This essay extrapolates from research and arguments that I have made in Fernandes (2006). Research was conducted during 1996–2003 and included an analysis of quantitative data, archival research, interviews that address national trends, and ethnographic research conducted primarily in Mumbai. My theoretical formulations in the essay have benefitted from collaborative work and discussions with Patrick Heller and from conversations with Rina Agarwala, Vivek Chibber, Ron Herring, John Harriss and Atul Kohli on the project of 'recovering class' in South Asia.

[2] See, for example, the initial debate sparked by Varma (1998).

post-liberalization middle class with both subaltern social groups and other segments of India's middle classes.

My objective in this essay is to present a set of theoretical arguments that address these two intersecting patterns of continuity and change that shape the politics and practices of the new middle class. Existing scholarship on India's middle classes has produced a complex and varied set of conceptual attempts at identifying the contours of this amorphous social group. Such studies have drawn both on traditional economic calculations based on income and occupational status *and* culturalist and discursive practices associated with consumption and the social imagination (Appadurai 1996; Bardhan 1993, 1994 [1984]; Mazzarella 2003; Rudra 1989; Sridharan 2004). The varied conceptual and measurement projects point to an essential definitional quandary inherent in any attempt at specifying fixed boundaries that can pin down the indeterminacy that stems from the highly differentiated social composition of the middle classes.[3] I address some of these conceptual problems that arise with attempts to define the Indian middle class by moving away from the problem of measurement that arises when studying the classes and moving towards an analysis of India's middle classes in terms of the reproduction of inequality. This essay is specifically concerned with developing a theoretical understanding of the middle classes that takes into account the structural reproduction of inequality. This is of particular importance given the rhetoric of newness and change associated with the liberalizing middle class in India. By shifting attention to the reproduction of inequality, I am interested in explaining why particular social formations in fact do not change, or are reproduced in distinctive ways, despite the vastness of change associated with contemporary globalization. In this endeavour, I seek to develop an understanding of 'structure' that is not a deterministic, pre-discursive realm, but is reproduced both diachronically through historical processes and synchronically through a set of classificatory practices.

Contemporary studies that have sought to understand the relationship between the middle classes and the politics of inequality in

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[3] For a discussion of the conceptual problems inherent in attempts at measuring or codifying various fractions of India's middle classes based on existing survey data, see Deshpande (2003).

India have built, in particular, on theories of hegemony (P. Chatterjee 2004; Corbridge and Harriss 2000; Deshpande 2003; Fernandes and Heller 2006). Such approaches have provided an important insight into the specific kinds of hegemonic projects that have linked the state and the middle classes with modernist projects of development. However, theories of hegemony that analyze the ways in which the middle classes are incorporated within ruling coalitions often extrapolate from the upper tiers of the middle classes and implicitly reproduce a conception of a unitary middle class. While building on such theories, I analyze the ways in which inequalities and differentiation within the middle class contribute to and complicate conceptions of hegemony.

India's middle classes are characterized by a high degree of differentiation such as rural–urban differences, internal economic differentiation between different segments of the middle classes, social distinctions like those of religion, caste, ethnicity and gender, and regional and linguistic differences.[4] While the aim of this essay is not to provide a comprehensive empirical sociological description of the middle classes, it is worth noting that such differences structure India's middle classes in varied and distinctive ways. Differences of income and social status may position the lower middle classes in very different ways from the upper middle classes. Socio-economic differences between the lower middle classes and the upper middle classes may be as great as, if not greater than, the differences between the lower middle classes and the working classes. Such contradictions in status and location mean that an identity of 'middle classness' is lived and constructed in sharply different ways for individuals from different social segments. For individuals from the lower middle classes, middle-class status may be marked by a sense of precariousness and a lack of socio-spatial separation from subaltern social groups. Meanwhile, middle-class socio-economic anxieties and social relationships are structured in historically specific ways by inequalities such as those of caste, gender and religion.

It is within this context of socio-economic differentiation that the identity of India's new liberalizing middle class has emerged. The mechanisms that shape the formation of India's new middle class are constituted by a range of classificatory practices that are both symbolic–discursive and structural in nature (Fernandes 2006). Individuals from various social strata accumulate and deploy different forms of capital to gain access to new middle-class status. The paradoxical quality of this process is that it is both fluid and structured. On the one hand, the dominant construction of new middle-class identity takes the form of a singular hegemonic representation of 'the new Indian middle class' that begins to act with a dominant set of interests. On the other hand, the range of internal forms of social differentiation that exist within the middle class shape the ways in which different social strata respond to, negotiate and attempt to gain access to membership in this new social group.

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[4] On social differentiation and India's middle classes, see Béteille (2001).

This essay argues for a deepening of the theoretical formulations of hegemony in ways that can account for these forms of differentiation within the middle classes and address the specific kinds of mechanisms through which these forms of differentiation are reproduced. The politics of middle-class differentiation produces a form of fractured hegemony in which conflicts within the middle classes become a central force in shaping broader patterns of contemporary democratic politics. Theories of hegemony have generally debated the ways in which particular social classes have been incorporated within historically specific hegemonic blocs. Gramscian theories of hegemony, for instance, focus on the ability of a particular dominant class or bloc to incorporate subaltern social groups, often through the production of ideological or cultural consent. The middle class usually operates as the ideological–cultural broker in such hegemonic political projects. My conception of fractured hegemony addresses the internal differences within the middle classes that complicate the ways in which hegemony is produced and consolidated. Internal hierarchies within the middle classes fracture the state–new middle class hegemonic bloc that has begun to emerge under liberalization. This concept of fractured hegemony specifically seeks to connect a theoretical understanding of hegemony with the reproduction of social inequality. A focus on fractured hegemony requires a shift from more generalized conceptions of class to an analysis of intersecting forms of inequality that both constitute and disrupt processes of class formation. Such an approach helps us understand how particular hegemonic blocs contribute to the reproduction of these inequalities. There are two further implications that arise from this argument: first, not all segments of the middle classes are incorporated into a particular hegemonic bloc in the same way; second, this fracturing of hegemony unsettles the historical bloc and opens up a conceptual–discursive space to consider alternative political alliances and responses. In the case of post-liberalization India, this cautions us against attaching an unquestioned sense of political permanence to the ascendancy of India's new middle class.

My objectives and arguments in this essay primarily engage in a conceptual and interpretive endeavour that reflects on what the new middle class can tell us more generally about inequality and class formation. The arguments are organized around three substantive themes. First, the essay begins with a critical discussion of theories of hegemony that have sought to conceptualize the political role of the middle classes. Second, it assesses the rise of a post-liberalization middle class and demonstrates the ways in which this social group both illustrates and requires an extension of existing theories of hegemony. Third, the essay analyzes the classificatory practices that reproduce intersecting forms of inequality (such as religion and caste) within the middle classes in ways that fracture state–new middle class alliances. Through this analysis, the essay argues that the study of the middle classes provides a lens for a broader understanding of the mechanisms that lead to the reproduction and durability of inequality. Given the limitations of space, my analysis in this essay will focus primarily on the intersections of caste and class.[5]

Theories of hegemony and India's middle classes[6]

Studies that have sought to understand the relationship between India's middle classes and the politics of inequality have focused on the ideological role that the middle classes have played in establishing the discursive terms of the hegemonic projects that have linked elite socio-economic groups with the modern nation state. From a historical perspective, the specificities of colonial rule both shaped and intensified the significance of the rise of the educated middle classes. As has been well documented by historians, the accumulation of educational and cultural capital became a primary mechanism for the formation of the colonial middle class.[7] First, the distinctiveness of this social group was marked by specific kinds of socio-economic resources such as access to English education and modern forms of professional employment. These resources came to distinguish this social group from the traditional elites, and led to particular forms of connection with and dependence on the colonial state (Haynes 1991). Second, this middle class rested on an emerging set of political claims of public representativeness that it made within the realm of democratic civic life. The political assertiveness of the new middle class rested on its claim to represent the general interests of the public, often against colonial state power. In this role, the middle class developed distinctive political claims that cast its interests through universalistic nationalist narratives and laid claim to a leading role within the ruling hegemonic bloc of the newly founded Indian nation.

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[5] For a more extensive discussion of the middle classes and the politics of other forms of social differentiation such as gender, language and religion, see Fernandes (2000a, 2006).

[6] For a fuller discussion of hegemony and India's new middle class, see Fernandes and Heller (2006).

Scholars of contemporary Indian politics have pointed to several analytical layers that are necessary for a conceptualization of the role of the middle classes in the establishment of this hegemonic bloc in the post-Independence period of the 20th century. At one level, this role has been principally an ideological one where, as Satish Deshpande has argued, 'the middle class is the class that *articulates* the hegemony of the ruling bloc' (Deshpande 2003: 139). In the Nehruvian period, the middle class, seeing itself as the central agent of the modernist state discourses of developmentalism, claimed to represent national interests. At another level, this strategic position of the middle classes in the post-Independence period was consolidated through the emergence and extension of particular forms of economic and political linkages with and dependencies on the state. Earlier colonial linkages between the state and the middle class that were created through educational policies and state employment were expanded through the state-managed model of economic planning and development.[8] In the early decades of Independence, the state contributed both directly and indirectly to the expansion and consolidation of middle-class interests in a number of ways.[9] The Nehruvian state-interventionist model of planned development consolidated the relationship between the developmentalist state and the middle class through a complex field of ideological/discursive, institutional, and economic practices and policies. The middle class represented a central social group serving as an agent that both shaped and was a primary target of nationalist discourses of development as well as of specific state policies. Historians of colonialism and the Indian nationalist movement have demonstrated the central role of the Indian middle class in shaping the model of modernist national development that would be consolidated in the initial decades of post-Independence India.[10]

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[7] There is a vast historical literature on middle-class formation and politics in the colonial and early nationalist period (see, for example, P. Chatterjee 1989a, 1992; Haynes 1991; Joshi 2001; Sangari 2001; T. Sarkar 2001).

While Nehruvian socialist rhetoric addressed the poor, developmental practices and policies reflected a modernist outlook that tapped into urban middle-class visions and desires for rapid technological and industrial growth. The centrality of the middle class as primary agents directing state socialist growth had important ramifications in India: such dynamics underlined and expanded the ways in which the relationship between the state and the middle class had been shaped by educational policies during the colonial period. For example, in the first two decades after Independence, growth rates in enrolment in higher education consistently outpaced those in primary education. As Rudolph and

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[8] See Deshpande (1997) on the middle classes and state-led development.

[9] See, for example, Pranab Bardhan's (1994 [1984]) discussion of professional and white-collar workers as one of the dominant propriety classes which has had a relationship with state networks of patronage and subsidies.

[10] This process was certainly contested by different visions of the Indian nation (for instance, by Gandhians and the communist parties, as well as by an array of social movements and protest politics). My point here is not to suggest a sense of historical inevitability but to provide an overview of the role of the middle class in the model of development that did become hegemonic.

Rudolph have noted, in 1955–56, the increase in enrolment growth rates in higher education was 74 per cent, compared to 31 per cent in primary education and 42 per cent in secondary education. In 1970–71, the percentage increase in higher education was 67 per cent, compared to 12 per cent in primary education and 19 per cent in secondary education (Rudolph and Rudolph 1987: 298). State-subsidized higher education continued to play a central role in middle-class formation. In contrast, as Atul Kohli notes, Nehru's government spent little on health and primary education (Kohli 2004: 266). Such trends continued in the early decades of Independence. Higher education received a disproportionate share of the available funds, in part due to political pressure from the urban middle class and the rural elite. This does not mean that the middle classes benefited uniformly from state-subsidized education or that education in general was over-funded.[11] Rather, education became a central arena in which state–middle class relationships of dependence were consolidated in this period.[12]

While the middle class benefited from specific forms of support from state-led development, it was simultaneously incorporated into the institutional and economic apparatus of a rapidly expanding set of state structures at both the local and national levels. Consider, for instance, the institutional dimensions of this process in the early years of Independence: connections between the middle class and the state were consolidated through the structure of the state bureaucracy. The basic structure of colonial authority, the Indian Civil Service, was retained and expanded into the Indian Administrative Service (IAS). During most of the early decades of Independence, this bureaucratic structure continued to draw on the service and professional classes that had been rising in significance through the colonial period. By the early 1980s, 71 per cent of the IAS recruits were drawn from the service class. In particular, the IAS remained a central draw for English-educated segments of these classes, given the significance of English-language skills

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[11] See Kapur and Mehta (2004) for a discussion of trends leading to a proportional decline in funding for education.

[12] Note that state governments are responsible for education and played a central role in this process.

for entry into IAS employment.[13] IAS recruits represented an elite segment of the middle classes, specifically one constituting parts of the intelligentsia. At a broader level, less privileged segments of the middle class also depended on state employment, for instance, in lower levels of the bureaucracy-sector employment. Access to government employment became a central avenue through which the middle and lower-middle classes could maintain or gain access to middle-class status.

The intersecting relationship between the state and the middle class was further consolidated and expanded through the growing significance of public enterprises in the Nehruvian model of development. The model of planned development that was established led to rapid growth in public-sector employment, quadrupling from 4.1 million in 1953 to an estimated 16.2 million in 1983 (Potter 1996: 159). Thus, a significant characteristic of state-managed development was the state provision of resources and employment to various segments of the middle class. Scholars who analyzed the socio-economic character of middle-class formation in the early decades of Independence sought to capture the materiality of the hegemonic incorporation of the middle classes through a conceptualization of state–class linkages. For instance, Pranab Bardhan (1994 [1984]) identified the role of professional middle-class and white-collar workers in controlling networks of patronage through the distribution of economic resources, arguing that such benefits transformed this section of the middle class into one of the 'dominant propriety classes' that shaped the state-directed model of Indian political economy. Scholars such as Bardhan provided conceptualizations of the 'bureaucratic–managerial-intellectual' in order to illustrate the central, distinct and self-expanding role that the middle classes played in the dominant class coalition of the Nehruvian period (ibid.).

Such theories of hegemony have provided important ways of conceptualizing the relationship between the middle classes and the political economy of the state. While my analysis builds on

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[13] As Potter (1996) notes, until the 1970s, English was the only language used for IAS examinations. The state did make some efforts to address this issue by making reservations for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. In recent years, the social composition of the IAS has substantially diversified to include individuals from rural and vernacular middle classes.

such theories, my interest is in shifting attention to the internal processes of differentiation within the middle classes. Conceptions of dominant class coalitions tend to extrapolate from the upper tiers of the middle classes (in particular the managerial–professional classes) and do not sufficiently address the reproduction of inequalities between different segments of the middle classes. The result is a danger of collapsing discussions of India's middle classes with broad generalizations about a homogenized elite. This danger is particularly acute in the post-liberalization period where contemporary public discourses tend to construct India's middle classes as a consumption-oriented group which is the primary beneficiary of economic reforms. While media images and public rhetoric have debated the consumerist nature of the middle classes or have produced their discursive representations as the central social agent of globalizing India, liberalization has had uneven effects on the middle classes. For instance, patterns of consumption have varied widely and middle-class consumption for large segments of this class has not taken the form of the kind of repeat consumerism associated with the middle classes in the advanced industrialized countries. Similarly, while upper middle-class professional–managerial workers have benefited from rising salaries and opportunities in private-sector and new-economy jobs, other segments of the new-economy labour market have been characterized by processes of casualization and subcontracting that have marked similarities with working-class employment (Fernandes 2006). Such internal differences within the middle classes caution us against theories of hegemony that are based on a presumed conception of the middle classes as a uniformly privileged social group.

Consider, for instance, Partha Chatterjee's recent argument that contemporary democratic politics in India rests on a distinction between 'civil society' and 'political society'. He argues for a distinction between these two categories in which '[o]ne is the line connecting civil society to the nation-state founded on popular sovereignty and granting equal rights to citizens. The other is the line connecting populations to governmental agencies pursuing multiple policies of security and welfare' (P. Chatterjee 2004: 37). This formulation rests on the assumption that the associational life of civil society is the preserve of the middle class, whereas political society shapes a relationship of political management (rather than citizenship rights) that exists between the state and subaltern groups. Chatterjee's objective is to point to the power differentials between elite and subaltern groups, differentials that intrinsically shape conceptions of civil society and citizenship. However, the limitation of this formulation is that it assumes that elites form a homogeneous group whose interests are represented in self-evident ways in civil society. For example, he argues that 'civil society' can be understood 'in the Indian context as an actually existing arena of institutions and practices inhabited by a relatively small section of the people whose social location can be identified with a fair degree of clarity' (ibid.: 38). Chatterjee's conception rests on an assumption of a naturalized identification between civil society, elite middle-class expression (voice) and the representation of a homogeneous set of middle-class interests. Such a conception provides an important lens for an understanding of the upper layers of middle-class and elite politics, particularly in terms of the ways in which elite discourses transform conceptions of citizenship into exclusionary mechanisms of representation. However, such a notion in effect conflates dominant conceptions of elite or middle-class 'culturally equipped citizens' (ibid.: 41) with the broader and highly differentiated group that constitutes India's middle class. This conflation misses two central political dynamics: (*i*) the basic mechanisms that lead to the reproduction of social inequalities within the middle classes, and (*ii*) the ways in which internal conflicts within the middle classes may disrupt the attempts of their upper tiers to consolidate their hegemonic role.

I turn next to a closer discussion of these theoretical arguments through an analysis of the post-liberalization middle class. The rise of this new middle-class identity illustrates the continued significance of the theories of hegemony that have sought to conceptualize India's middle classes. This hegemonic incorporation of the middle class has both continued and been fractured in specific ways with the rise of a new middle-class identity in the post-liberalization period.

Conceptualizing the post-liberalization 'new' middle class

The new Indian middle class represents the political construction of a social group that operates as a proponent of economic liberalization. This middle class is not 'new' in terms of its structural or social basis. In other words, its 'newness' is not characterized by new upwardly mobile entrants to middle-class status. Rather, its newness refers to a process of production of a distinctive social and political identity that represents and lays claim to the benefits of liberalization. The urban middle class, in effect, represents a hegemonic socio-cultural embodiment of India's transition to a committed liberalizing nation. In public discourses, practices of consumption and the depictions of associated lifestyle changes distinguish the new Indian middle class from the older traditional middle class that was held back by the cultural strictures on consumption inherent in Nehruvian state socialism and Gandhian ideals of austerity (Khilnani 1997).[14] This heightened visibility has transformed the new middle class into an object for the projection of political, cultural and ideological assumptions from a range of actors. Proponents of liberalization — and market-research firms — have been preoccupied with assessments of the size of the middle class and its potential as an untapped consumer market. In the early 1990s, a time of euphoria over the potential of India's consuming classes, public discourses routinely referred to 'India's 200-million-strong middle class' as a resource that could automatically be mobilized to consume. Although subsequent events have demonstrated that the middle class is more varied than this image of a sleeping consumer giant, the definition of this class, in terms of consumption, has nevertheless been consolidated through such discursive practices. The creation of this identity represents a hegemonic process that is, of course, often at odds with local variations in the consumption practices of middle-class individuals and families. Nevertheless, such representational practices engage in a process of 'enframing' (Mitchell 2002) the new middle class in ways that have lasting symbolic/material effects on middle-class lives and practices.

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[14] I am, of course, sketching the broad strokes of representational shifts in political culture. At the hegemonic level, internal differentiation within the middle classes is often concealed in such representational shifts. Thus, in both the Nehruvian and the post-liberalization periods, dominant representational practices have tended to depict the middle classes in unitary terms (whether as representatives of modernist state development or of market-driven globalization, respectively). However, these are dominant representations that seek the hegemonic incorporation of the middle classes. A focus on inequality and fracturing is important precisely because it helps us understand how and why these hegemonic projects falter. Note also that such dominant representations exaggerate the break between middle class–state linkages in the shifts from the Nehruvian to the post-liberalization period. I have addressed this role of the state in more depth in Fernandes (2009).

The hegemonic boundaries of the new middle class are not a simple reflection of an existing socio-economic reality; nor are they merely an ideological invention that is imposed in a uniform way on local expressions of middle-class experience and identity. Rather, such boundaries are complex symbolic–material frames that intersect with and are the product of both historical processes as well as the temporality of everyday practices. To illustrate, at one level, the hegemonic boundaries of middle-class consumer identity embody both the symbolic shifts within public discursive narratives and the material shifts produced by economic policies of liberalization that have opened up consumer markets and brought about structural changes in employment and income levels (for instance, in the expanding service-sector industries, private-sector employment).[15] Such structural changes in employment also require a qualification of the newness of this middle class. At the structural level, the expansion of the upper tiers of these economic sectors has largely benefited English-speaking urban white-collar segments of the middle class, who are presented with new employment opportunities, particularly in private-sector employment.

While the composition of the post-liberalization middle class is characterized more by continuities with older patterns of middle-class formation, the heart of the construction of this social group rests on the assumption that other segments of the middle class and upwardly mobile working class can potentially join it. For example, the lifestyles and patterns of consumption depicted in media images are associated with individuals who can afford English-based higher education and credentials such as MBAs. However, youth in the lower middle classes in small towns and

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[15] Such boundaries are of course fractured by local variations in middle-class identity formation as middle-class families and individuals negotiate, contest and are shaped by such dominant frames. A closer analysis of these variations cannot be addressed within the scope of this essay. My objective here is to point to some of the hegemonic master narratives that delineate this new middle-class identity.

rural areas may attempt to adopt educational and credentialing strategies by refining their public-speaking skills or accumulating marketing diplomas from unaccredited institutes. Individuals in the middle or working classes also may use the purchase of particular kinds of commodities and brands to signify upward mobility. This potential access to membership makes the boundaries of this interest group both fluid and political in nature. In the face of the diversity of the middle classes, the identity of the new Indian middle class provides a kind of normative standard to which this larger group can aspire. The boundaries of this emerging group are fluid precisely because they hold the promise of entry for other social segments: the underlying promise of the hegemonic identity of the new middle class is that individuals from varying social segments can acquire the kinds of capital (such as education, credentials, skills, and cultural resources) that can help them gain access to membership in this distinctive post-liberalization middle class. The ability of individuals and social segments to accumulate capital and engage in strategies of conversion, moreover, are both shaped and constrained by their interaction with existing structures of inequality such as those of caste, language, religion, and gender. The dynamic nature of the mechanisms and practices involved in this process makes the boundaries fluid and open to contestation even as resources and historical inequalities *structure* the boundaries.[16] The paradoxical quality of this process — that it is both fluid and structured — allows for the coexistence of the rise of a singular hegemonic representation of 'the new Indian middle class' that begins to act with a dominant set of interests, on the one hand, and a range of internal forms of social differentiation that exist within this group, on the other. Consider specific examples of these kinds of classificatory practices that have begun to constitute the new middle class in India: within the labour market, middle-class individuals' access to 'new economy' jobs may rest both on

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[16] Contemporary studies of the middle classes often draw heavily on Bourdieu's theory of distinction. However, such approaches often mischaracterize Bourdieu's theory by reducing his understanding of distinction to one of cultural distinction. See, for example, Liechty (2003). In fact, Bourdieu's central project is to provide a structural theory of class structuration, one that does not treat culture as a residual factor. The decline of class analysis in South Asian and cultural studies has led to a neglect of these insights. See Herring and Agarwala (2006) on this point.

the individual's ability to access particular forms of cultural and social capital (for example, English education, credentials of higher education), as well as on inequalities and identities such as those of gender or caste that track individuals into particular segments of the labour market. Or consider, for instance, the role of middle-class civic organizations. Middle-class neighbourhood organizations have increasingly begun to mobilize in an effort to regain their control over public space and reproduce a clear socio-spatial separation from groups such as street vendors and squatters. The formation of the new middle class is thus shaped by the internal differences that are in turn created through unequal distribution of capital and structured identity-based inequalities. The identity of the new middle class is forged through specific kinds of intersections between class, gender, caste, and religion.

This becomes evident when we look at the way in which caste distinctions shape the new middle-class labour market. While there has been a significant shift in the caste composition of the middle classes, caste continues to play a significant role in creating layers of stratification within this socio-economic group (Sheth 1999a, 1999b). The reliance of lower-caste groups on state policies and state employment in gaining access to middle-class membership has intensified the upper-caste characteristics of new middle-class employment in private-sector, white-collar employment. According to D. L. Sheth, survey research conducted in 1996 showed that 53.3 per cent of the upper castes surveyed were employed in white-collar employment, in contrast to 26.6 per cent of the backward castes and only 9.2 per cent of the Dalits. Thus, upper-caste groups are found to be concentrated in white-collar employment while lower-caste groups and Muslims are comparatively under-represented in these employment sectors.

My research indicates that this intersection of caste and class continues to structure the liberalizing middle class. While changing patterns of white-collar employment and the entry of lower-caste groups into the middle classes have been aided by state affirmative action policies and state employment, the private sector has until recently been outside the purview of such policies.[17] Such policies have expanded opportunities and led to social inclusion within middle-class government jobs. However, under liberalization the status of middle-class employment has been shifting from state to private-sector jobs, and processes of privatization are beginning to reduce opportunities for government employment. A classic example of the shift in the status of employment can be seen in the changing composition of the Indian civil service. While Indian civil-service jobs were historically the preserve of upper-caste, middle-class Indians, the composition of IAS cadres has been shifting to include rural elites and new entrants to the middle class who represent a greater degree of caste and regional diversity.[18] However, this shift has occurred as private-sector employment in fields such as business and information technology has replaced civil-service employment as the social marker of upper-tier middle-class employment in the context of liberalization. Meanwhile, new-economy jobs require forms of cultural capital (e.g., cultural knowledge, educational credentials, lifestyle practices such as dress, particular kinds of fluency in English) that often rework caste inequalities through nuanced social codes. The use of informal social networks as a primary means of recruitment in private-sector employment also intensifies the salience of social distinctions such as caste. Noting that caste discrimination is reproduced in the private sector through the use of informal social networks, Vivek Kumar suggests that 'vernacular newspapers and backward areas are deliberately blacked out to reduce the pool of talent' (V. Kumar 2005: 805). In other words, caste privilege provides socio-cultural resources that make up the social and cultural capital that middle-class individuals need to negotiate new-economy jobs.

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[17] I discuss conflicts over caste and the private sector in the next section.

The making of the post-liberalization middle class is thus shaped in mutually constitutive ways with the reproduction of caste inequality.

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[18] Thus, the urban background (defined by the place of parents' residence) of entrants in the civil services declined from 32.2 per cent in 1990 to 25 per cent in 1997 (see Vijay Jung Thapa, 'Enter the New Babu', *India Today International*, 1 January 2001, pp. 36–40, p. 37.). Myron Weiner (2001) has argued that the political rise of groups such as the backward castes has helped promote middle-class segments through strategies such as civil-service appointments, but has not changed broader policies regarding health and education that would benefit the lower castes in general.

The rise of this new middle class confirms the continued salience of theories of hegemony that scholars have deployed to understand state–class relationships in postcolonial India. The new middle class, in effect, consists of the upper tiers of the English-speaking middle classes. Furthermore, as I have noted, the hegemonic claims of this relatively narrow segment of the middle classes rest on its ability to represent a new normative standard for the larger social group. On one level, the consolidation of upper castes within upper-tier new-economy jobs illustrates the upper-caste characteristic of the hegemonic new middle-class identity that I have been analyzing. As Deshpande has noted, in 1999–2000, Hindu upper castes

> formed almost 37 per cent of the population of urban India. But they accounted for almost 66 per cent of all non-technical subject graduates, more than 65 per cent of medical graduates, almost 67 per cent of engineering and technology graduates, and about 62 per cent of graduates in agricultural sciences. In sum, the Hindu UC [upper castes] are a little more than one-third of the total urban population, but around two-thirds of professional and higher education degree holders. (Deshpande 2006a: 2439)

Such data is particularly significant given that the middle classes who have successfully moved into new-economy jobs are precisely from this socio-economic profile of educated, technical and professional graduates.[19] This appears to transform the new middle class into a relatively homogeneous (in terms of caste) elite social group.

However, at another level, the promise of this post-liberalization new middle-class identity is also one of access and potential membership to this group. Members of the broader middle classes, particularly those from segments such as the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) or dalit castes, negotiate their sense of middle-classness in relation to this dominant new middle-class identity. Such negotiations do not simply rest on practices of imitation and emulation

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[19] The data is based on 1999–2000 National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) data. See also Deshpande and Yadav (2006) for a more comprehensive analysis of caste and higher education.

through new consumption strategies, but on the intensification of differentiation and inequality.[20] Consider, for instance, the question of access to new middle-class membership. Much of the research and public debate on the new middle class have tended to focus on patterns of consumption, looking at the ways in which individuals from varying segments of India's middle classes have sought to deploy particular strategies of commodity consumption in order to gain symbolic access to membership within this new middle-class group.[21] Thus, the visible consumption of particular forms of commodities becomes a strategy for displaying new middle-class status. However, an exclusive focus on the symbolic/discursive dimensions of consumer behaviour overlooks the ways in which practices of middle-class formation contribute to the structural durability of inequality.[22]

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[20] There is a vast literature on the role of the media and advertising industries in constituting the identity of the liberalizing middle class (Fernandes 2000a; Mazzarella 2003; Rajagopal 1999). Such research has pointed to the use of vernacular programming and packaging as a symbolic/discursive strategy that may alleviate the cultural anxieties of the vernacular middle classes. While representational practices are one element in middle-class formation, an assumption that they are the sole or foundational factor in identity formation misses the tensions, intersections and mutually constitutive relationship between the cultural and economic realms. Thus, vernacular middle-class anxieties cannot be reduced to a purely cultural realm (for example, one that is disconnected from concerns of access to employment and economic status associated with new-economy employment). A comprehensive discussion of this relationship is beyond the bounds of this essay; I have addressed this mutually constitutive relationship between culture and structure in new middle-class formation in Fernandes (2006).

[21] See Mankekar (1999). For an interesting discussion of the contradictions of this process, see van Wessel (2004).

[22] In other words, the point is not that consumption practices do not matter as strategies of upward mobility, in constituting everyday middle-class life and in shaping middle-class subjectivities. However, an exclusive definition of the liberalizing middle class in terms of consumption practices alone cannot adequately explain why specific forms of hierarchy and inequality have not changed. See Mohanty (2006) for an analysis of NSSO data that illustrates the impact of caste inequality on levels of consumption in both rural and urban India.

The structural durability of middle-class formation is illustrated by the ways in which individuals use different forms of social, cultural and economic capital in order to gain access to new-economy jobs. Middle-class individuals attempting to accumulate and deploy such forms of capital draw on existing social, kinship and family networks. As I have noted, caste-based resources are central to processes through which segments of the middle class gain access to or are impeded from membership in the liberalizing middle class.[23] However, the new middle class does not just incorporate pre-existing forms of inequality, it also generates inequality. The classificatory practices through which individuals attempt to gain access to membership within the new middle class are about both access and restriction. The acquisition of education, for instance, is the most evident strategy of upward mobility for a wide range of social groups.[24] As I have noted earlier, individuals attempting to deploy strategies of upward mobility resort to a range of informalized ones such as gaining admission to the mushrooming diploma-granting institutes providing training in areas[25] that facilitate entry into new-economy jobs. However, new middle-class strategies simultaneously transform education into a thicker set of class practices that are contingent on a wide range of socio-cultural distinctions based on language, lifestyle, credentials, residence — distinctions that encode historically produced inequalities such as those of caste and language.[26]

Middle-class classificatory practices thus, in effect, result in forms of social closure that generate exclusionary boundaries marked by caste and language.[27] The persistence of identities and

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[23] See Upadhya (this volume) on the reproduction of caste hierarchies in the IT sector.

[24] For a useful discussion of caste and merit in higher education, see Deshpande (2006a).

[25] Areas as widely ranging as business administration, public speaking, computer training, English-language skills, and corporate cultural practices.

[26] For instance, the hegemonic new middle class still largely comprises segments of the upper-caste Hindu middle classes.

[27] Note that language is not simply about formal knowledge of English versus vernacular language. Aesthetic skills related to language such as accent, fluency, and cultural knowledge socially code language with class, status and caste inequalities.

inequalities of caste and language in shaping the formation of the new middle class and the high level of internal socio-economic differentiation and inequality within the middle classes caution against overestimating the shift in the character or composition of the new middle class that is now increasingly associated with the post-liberalization period. The identity formation of the new middle class is also shaped by the often unsuccessful attempts of broader social segments (such as segments of the rural and traditional middle classes and upwardly mobile working classes) to gain access to it.[28] The dynamics of intersecting identities and inequalities that I have sketched point to the ways in which the political significance of the new middle class lies in the tension between the emerging hegemonic identity of this group and the differentiation and disparities that characterize its social composition.[29] Internal differentiation thus creates competing constructions of middle-class identity that exist in productive tension with each other. These constructions in turn produce exclusions and periodically provoke political conflicts over access and entry. The often rigid exclusions and the conflicts that erupt over them point to us the partial and fractured nature of the hegemonic incorporation of the middle classes in the post-liberalization developmentalist project.

The politics of fractured hegemony: India's new middle class and the politics of caste

The forms of layered inequalities that are an intrinsic part of India's new middle class provide a window for a closer understanding of the fracturing of hegemony. Theories of hegemony, as I have noted earlier, rest primarily on conceptual and political understandings of the middle class as a homogeneous and privileged elite. However, recent patterns of middle-class politics have in fact been as much about internal conflicts within the middle classes as they have been about more conventional elite–subaltern conflicts. The 'Mandal' controversy over caste reservations, for instance, became an iconic event in contemporary narratives on the resurgence of an angry, alienated upper-caste middle class that sought to reclaim its national primacy in the 1990s (Hansen 1999). Yet these events have been as much an internal struggle over identities and interests within the middle classes as a backlash against various subordinated groups. As Zoya Hasan has argued in her study of contemporary politics in northern India, the growing significance of regional political parties and caste-based politics has also been linked to the upward mobility of newly emerging groups that have contested the social and political dominance of the traditional upper-caste English-educated middle classes (1998: 136). Political conflicts over government jobs and reservations have fundamentally been about access to middle-class status and corresponding conflicts over the socio-economic and cultural definition of middle-class identity in the face of new upwardly mobile social groups. An analysis of the politics of such internal differentiations — of caste, language and urban/rural cultural styles — points out an important need for caution against tendencies to assume that the middle class is associated with a homogenous form of identity and politics. More significantly, such dynamics points to the ways in which inequalities within the middle classes disrupt the hegemonic ideological projects of the upper tiers of the middle classes.

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[28] See Jeffrey, Jeffery and Jeffery (2004).

[29] This tension is often missed by the conflation of the middle classes with a homogenized notion of 'elites'; thus contemporary discussions of the Indian middle class often refer to the upper tier of the middle class that has laid claim to the dominant identity of the new middle class.

More recent conflicts over caste reservations illustrate some of the ways in which hegemony is fractured by internal differentiation within the middle classes. Conflicts over access to representation in higher education and in private-sector employment are in many ways about competing middle-class demands in a liberalizing economy. Excluded and marginalized caste groups who have acquired or are seeking middle-class status attempt to gain access to the benefits which the upper tiers of the middle classes (the embodiment of the dominant representation of new middle-class identity) receive under liberalization. These demands are intensified by the socio-economic effects of privatization. As Thimmaiah notes,

> the policy of liberalization and privatization reduced the number of employment opportunities in the public sector, which, in turn, reduced the job opportunities for SC/STs and OBCs in government administration and government owned enterprises. According to the

> *Report of the Working Group in Empowering SCs* appointed by the National Commission on Scheduled Castes, the SCs lost about 1,13, 430 job opportunities in the central government during the period 1992–97, constituting a decline of 10.07 percent. (2005: 745)

The debate over reservations is in this sense partly a response to the internal hierarchies within the middle classes that are intensified as the state withdraws from its post-Independence role of incorporating various fragments of the middle class through employment. The debate also points to the continued discrepancy between the dominant identity of the post-liberalization middle class, marked by privatized identities and strategies on the one hand, and continued middle-class demands for state support (for instance, through public-sector employment and caste-based reservations) on the other.[30]

Such political conflicts over reservations fracture state–new middle-class alliances in post-liberalization India in important ways.[31] State rhetoric in support of reservations and state policies designed to implement them reflect an attempt on the part of the state to incorporate broader segments of middle-class support for the current state developmentalist paradigm of liberalization. Critics of caste reservations have pointed to the political calculations (the politics of vote-banks) that have shaped the Congress-led UPA government's support of reservations. However, the deeper point at hand lies not simply in short-term electoral calculations but in the need for the state to construct a viable hegemonic bloc in the post-liberalization period. In many ways, the turn of the Congress-led government to rhetorical support of caste reservations in the private sector represents a recognition that a narrower new middle class–state compact cannot provide an adequate developmental

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[30] The move is still a relative one as the new middle class also continues to make demands on the state, for instance, in its demands for state supports of a liberalized economy, state management of public space, the creation of middle-class models of civic life, state resources for middle class-oriented urban development and the state policing of civic order.

[31] My point is not that conflicts about caste equality and reservations are only about middle-class politics; my intention is to focus on the middle-class dimensions of these conflicts.

alliance in support of liberalization.[32] However, state attempts at incorporating broader segments of the middle classes conflict with new middle-class investments in the privatized accumulation and deployment of capital (social, cultural and economic) within India's new economy. The state–new middle class compact which is associated with liberalization and which appears as a naturalized inevitability in public rhetoric and representations is thus fundamentally fractured by these internal hierarchies within the middle classes.

While state policies of liberalization have begun to restructure the hegemonic bloc which incorporated the middle classes both ideologically (as cultural brokers of Nehruvian state-led developmentalism) and materially (through state-subsidized employment and education), the fractured nature of the middle classes unsettles the new middle class–state project of liberalization that has sought to take its place. Such internal differentiation within the new middle classes is of course not new, and in many ways has continually resurfaced in the post-colonial period as the Nehruvian project failed to live up to its own promises of modernist progress and equality. The fractured hegemony and its mutually constitutive relationship with durable forms of inequality once again underline these historical continuities alerting us against overestimating the newness and change associated with India's middle class in the post-liberalization period.

Conclusion

In this essay, I have argued that the fractured nature of the state–new middle class hegemonic bloc in post-liberalization India helps us deepen our understanding of the structural reproduction of inequality. The theoretical discussion I have sketched has sought to capture both the sense of liminality that characterizes middle-class

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[32] The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has sought to try and create alternative bases of support with upper castes, for instance, by focusing on reservations for economically marginalized upper castes. However, as Thimmaiah notes, both the Congress and the BJP promised to introduce affirmative action in the private sector in their 2004 election manifestos (2005: 745).

identity and the ways in which the boundaries around and within the middle class are maintained, often with an enduring rigidity. The liminality refers to the symbolic politics of class formation in which the promise of access to membership in a group such as the new middle class begins to shape the group's practices in material ways. The ability of individuals and social segments to accumulate capital and maintain or gain access to new middle-class membership is both shaped and constrained by their interaction with layered structures of inequality that have long historical legacies. Such strategies of conversion are shaped by the reworking of long-standing social inequalities such as the symbolic and material structures of caste, religion, language, and gender.

One of the cornerstones of my theoretical argument is that it is this kind of symbiotic relationship between structure and discourse that underpins the dynamics of middle-class formation. More specifically, a practice-oriented approach can grasp the dynamic nature of this interaction between the structural and discursive dimensions of class formation; it can also move away from the opposition between divergent intellectual approaches, theoretically oriented either by a structuralist/economistic conception of social groups that rests on income or occupation, or by a culturalist definition that is based on discourse or consumption. A theoretical understanding of the structuralist dimension of middle-class formation captures the reproduction of inequality in ways that do not imply a return to a deterministic or teleological model of social life. At one level, 'structure' in this context is not a deterministic, prediscursive realm, but is temporally reproduced both diachronically through historical processes and synchronically as various forms of capital are converted into classificatory practices. At another level, 'structure' can be thought of as 'intersectional' rather than unitary; that is, the structuring of the new middle class is contingent on complex matrices of social differentiation. A structural theory of middle-class formation then is neither static nor unitary, yet it can provide a broader understanding of the role of the middle classes in sustaining durable forms of inequality and in shaping state–middle class alliances.

The tension between the hegemonic identity of the new middle class and the internal differentiation within the middle classes will continue to shape politics in contemporary India. As this differentiation has led to conflicts over governmental caste-based reservations, competition for private-sector employment represents a potentially ripe arena for continued political claims for access from marginalized sections of the middle class attempting to gain new benefits associated with liberalization. The rise of the new middle class is always accompanied by the fear of falling for large segments of the middle class struggling to preserve their social status or simply trying to gain access to the benefits associated with this new middle-class identity. It is this sense of uncertainty and unpredictability that unfolds through the aspirations of access, strategies of social closure and fractured hegemonic blocs that 'structure' the politics of India's new middle class.

4

The Spectre of Comparisons: Studying the Middle Class of Colonial India

Sanjay Joshi

From its very inception, the middle class of colonial India suffered comparisons, and suffered in comparisons. Imperialists such as Lord Dufferin and Rudyard Kipling derided the claims of those who represented themselves as the Indian middle class, seeing them as deracinated hybrids who could never hope to be fully Western, and who, at the same time, were cut off from their own culture and civilization because of their exposure to Western ideas (Blackwood 1890; Kipling 1899). More surprising is a considerable body of writing, equally scathing in its evaluations of the middle class, from those who were themselves from this social group. Comparisons, explicit or otherwise, also pervade the historiography of the middle class of colonial India. Here too, while one can more easily understand why those blinkered by Eurocentricism highlight the inauthenticity of the Indian middle class, it is less evident why postcolonial approaches, which are otherwise committed to moving beyond Eurocentric representations, also appear to reproduce the binary between an authentic and a derivative middle class. My essay seeks to explore and explain some of these apparent dualities by paying close attention to middle-class formation in one of the more important cities of colonial India — Lucknow. At the heart of my argument are notions of authenticity and inauthenticity. One reason why colonial and nationalist intellectuals alike could disparage the aspirations of the emerging middle class of colonial India was the prevalence of the idea that there was in fact a real and authentic middle class against which they could compare, unfavourably, the Indian version. But, as this essay suggests, the comparative approach itself can be quite valuable, even if it hasn't always been used to good effect. I attempt to use comparisons to suggest that a truly comparative history of the middle classes in the West and the non-Western parts of the world can in fact help us better understand the contradictions that are an inherent part of middle-class formation across the world. This comparison reveals that the notion of an originary, authentic middle class, industrial in origins and progressive and liberal in its views, is a myth. It is, moreover, a myth which was not only maintained in earlier critiques of the Indian middle class, but which, to a large extent, continues to inform contemporary historiographical accounts.

Aurobindo Ghosh may well have been one of the first to consistently use the label 'middle class' to describe people who were, objectively speaking, very much an elite. By any set of sociological indicators, the group Ghosh referred to — folks such as journalists, lawyers and sundry intellectuals — belonged within the top two deciles of the Indian population. For the nationalist Ghosh, though, the problem was not so much the elitism of this social group, as its cultural inauthenticity. He compared the Indian middle-class to low-priced British imports, such as 'cheap Liverpool cloths, shoddy Brummagem wares', which, he argued, killed 'the fine and genuine textures' of traditional Indian society. 'Of all brand new articles we have imported', Ghosh said, 'inconceivably the most important is that large class of people — journalists, barristers, doctors, officials, graduates and traders — who have grown up and are increasing with prurient rapidity under the aegis of the British rule: and this class I call the middle class'.[1] Rather than using labels such as 'the intelligentsia', or 'Western-educated classes', Ghosh insisted on using the term 'middle class' because, he said, 'when we are so proud of our imported English goods, it would be absurd, when we want labels for them, not to import their English names as well'.[2]

One would have thought that more than half a decade after Aurobindo Ghosh's critique, with a new Indian middle-class leadership poised to take power from the British, there would be fewer anxieties about the lack of cultural authenticity. But as late as the 1940s, we find these concerns to be prominent even in the writing of that quintessential representative of the Westernized middle class, Jawaharlal Nehru. Writing about the era following the First World War, Nehru contrasted India's sturdy peasants, tempered by centuries of hardship, with 'declassé intellectuals' cut off from the land. This contrast itself is revealing. Romanticizing the hardship of the peasants, Nehru believed them to be somehow more authentic than the middle class, whom he chose to represent as belonging neither to the traditional nor to the modern world. 'Neither the old nor the new offered them any hope', said Nehru of the middle class (Nehru 1981: 357). Reflecting some of the ideas first articulated by men like Dufferin or Kipling, Nehru wrote to say that while the middle class were attracted by modernity 'they lacked its inner content' (ibid.: 358). Nowhere does he tell us what this inner content was, or why educated Indians were incapable of grasping its inner content. Presumably, the socialist Nehru perceived some impermeable barrier, undoubtedly related to the very different historical experiences of the Western and the non-Western world, that prevented them from doing do. Frustrated by their inability to be real and authentic, Nehru suggested that among the Indian middle classes, 'Some tried to cling tenaciously to the dead forms of the past . . . [while] Others made themselves pale and ineffectual copies of the West' (ibid.). Because neither approach was effective, men belonging to the Indian middle class became 'derelicts, frantically seeking some foothold of security for body and mind and finding none, they floated aimlessly in the murky waters of Indian life' (ibid.).

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[1] Sri Aurobindo, 'New Lamps for Old — 3', *Indu Prakash*, 28 August 1893.

[2] Ibid.

While we can dwell on the social, political, psychological, or cultural reasons for these representations of the Indian middle class, what I would like to highlight here is the historical. One reason why both the colonialists and the nationalists, the traditionalists and the modernists, in India could label the Indian middle class inauthentic was the assumption that the real history of a real middle class lay elsewhere, specifically in Euro-America. The Eurocentricism of traditional historical scholarship has reinforced these ideas. A host of scholars have questioned the existence of a 'real' middle class in India altogether. Working on revisionist interpretations of Indian nationalism, historians from Cambridge University in the 1970s saw educated Indians acting as 'clients' of other powerful people, and as being completely without an independent political agenda (Gallagher et al. 1973; Seal 1973). Michelguglielmo Torri built on these ideas to argue that these studies exploded a 'master concept' of Indian historiography and signed the 'death warrant' of the middle class as a category of Indian history (Torri 1991). Much of the contemporary discussion on the Indian middle class continues to be inhibited by comparisons with an ideal-type of the category, derived ultimately from rather simplistic readings of European history.

There is thus a tendency to posit a somewhat idealized notion of class formation and unity, and compare it to the more messy terrain of historical reality, only to find the latter wanting. Harjot Oberoi sums up this understanding of the middle class. In his otherwise fascinating study of the construction of modern Sikhism, Oberoi rejects the applicability of the term middle class to Indian history because he sees the former as a category which is the product of Europe's historical experience of industrialization, and without the same historical experience, India's 'petty bureaucrats and urban professionals . . . could not appropriately be named middle class', he asserts (Oberoi 1994: 260). The language of comparisons derived from Eurocentric understandings of history, then, has only served to highlight the lack, the failure of the Indian middle class. Implicit in this formulation, however unintentionally, is also the assumption that other social groups who constitute themselves as middle classes in other parts of the world must ultimately also be judged by standards created through the histories of the West.

This is exactly the point Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000) makes in his very thoughtful work discussing the impact of modern historical categories on subaltern histories. He argues that in the world of scholarly knowledge, only 'Europe' — by which he means a model of modernity derived from Western history — is 'theoretically (i.e., at the level of the fundamental categories that shape historical thinking) knowable' (ibid.: 29). The dominance of the West over the rest of the world has meant that models derived from the history of this 'Europe' are universalized, so that histories of the aptly termed non-Western regions of the world are always compared to supposedly universal models, and found wanting. The universalization of Western modernity perpetuates the dominance of 'Europe' over Others through what Gyan Prakash termed 'the representations of all histories as History' (Prakash 1994: 1484). This universalization of modernity, in turn, means that historical developments that are different can only be evaluated either as emulations, deviations or failures. Chakrabarty's own response to this is not to call for insularity. In fact, he explicitly rejects the possibility of a history framed by 'indigenous' or nativist categories, and acknowledges the impossibility of constructing a historical discourse outside of the categories of modernity. Instead, Chakrabarty asks historians to 'provincialize Europe', by showing 'the ambivalences, contradictions, the use of force, and the tragedies and ironies' that necessarily form a part of the universalization of modernity (Chakrabarty 2000: 43).

Chakrabarty's contribution is important among attempts that seek a language for writing comparisons into history. It allows for delving into the specifics of the histories of non-Western subjects without necessarily evaluating them by a history they could never replicate, or by a set of standards which would always find them wanting. In light of Chakrabarty's call for using 'third-world histories' to demonstrate the partiality, the localness of Euro-American histories, it is surprising to note how he restricts himself in his own readings of the history of the Bengali middle class. As one part of establishing the 'provinciality' of the claims of modernity, Chakrabarty demonstrates aspects of radical difference between constructions of a modern domesticity in colonial Bengal and the ideal-type of bourgeois modernity. This is a theme he takes up in more detail in a parallel essay where he shows the Bengali modern, exemplified by the neologism '*grihalakshmi*' (to translate this as 'goddess of the home' would be to undermine the point Chakrabarty wishes to make). This modern construction, he argues, is constituted by tensions, as it seeks to incorporate both the historical and modern as defined by the ideal-type of Western modernity, and the anti-historical modern 'tied to mythico-religious time' which 'escapes and exceeds bourgeois time' (Chakrabarty 1994: 81). There is much in the Bengali modern which is derivative of the modernity brought by colonialism, he argues, but it is also a modernity which seeks to evoke 'formations of pleasure, emotions and ideas of good life that associated themselves with models of non-autonomous, non-bourgeois and non-secular personhood' (ibid.: 84–85). His point here, as in large parts of *Provincializing Europe*, appears to be to demonstrate the limits of the universality of the model of modernity derived from the Euro-American experience. Chakrabarty in fact appears to suggest that these are 'subaltern pasts' which are not really amenable to historicization without doing considerable violence to the subjects of these pasts (Chakrabarty 2000: 97–113).

Chakrabarty makes an important point, but I wonder if this celebration of difference does not ultimately undermine the strengths his arguments bring to comparative histories. By bracketing off subaltern pasts or non-bourgeois personhood from the discourse of historicism, Chakrabarty's arguments ghettoize Indian pasts in ways that are eminently agreeable to the practitioners of Eurocentricism, who have been only too willing to Orientalize and Other such histories. What I try to do with my own study of the middle class in colonial Lucknow is to build on some of the strengths of this argument while asserting that looking at the differences — the 'radical heterogenieties' of Indian middle-class modernity from the ideal-types of Western modernity — actually gives us a vantage point from which we can rethink our ideas about modernity itself.

The Lucknow case

For those more familiar with the stereotypical images of the city, Lucknow may seem an unusual location for this study. References to Lucknow evoke a picture of Nawabs and their courts, and the high culture associated with the latter. Representations of Lucknow in novels, stories and films (for instance, Satyajit Ray's *Shatranj ke Khilari* and Muzaffar Ali's *Umrao Jan*) have reinforced the image of a city whose history ended in 1857. Such is the power of these timeless images that in 1992 — almost 140 years after the deposition of the last ruling Nawab of Awadh — the Shatabdi Express, a train service run by Northern Railways, welcomed me to 'Lucknow, the city of the Nawabs'! Lucknow's Nawabi history dates from 1774, when the royal court of the Awadh Nawabs was transferred from Faizabad to Lucknow, and ends with British annexation in 1856. In this 80-year period, a need to establish their legitimacy as rulers, particularly after the break with the Mughal Empire, led to lavish spending on ritual and ceremonial occasions by the Nawabs of Awadh (Fisher 1993: 71–79). It was the emulation of the values of this court by courtiers and others associated with it which created the 'Nawabi culture' of Lucknow (Sharar 1989). However, the annexation of Awadh by the British created a major disruption in this historical process. The centre around which 'court culture' existed, collapsed: colonial administrators reshaped the city and broke up communities even as they sought to fashion a new colonial Lucknow (Oldenburg 1989: 39–41).

However, new opportunities accompanied the disruptions. A new political and cultural ethos came to prevail in Lucknow once the Nawabi court was removed. Whatever remained of the older 'Lucknow culture' associated with the court was steadily marginalized, as people sought to negotiate the altered circumstances of their existence. By the last quarter of the 19th century, and certainly so by the early decades of the 20th century, the 'Nawabi' (derived from the Nawabs) aristocracy played a very insignificant role in Lucknow's public affairs. The landed gentry, the Taluqdars, were too busy lobbying for their collective and individual interests through their connections with sympathetic administrators (Reeves 1991). Rather than Nawabs and Taluqdars, it was a group of Western-educated men, largely in professional or literary occupations, often from families with a tradition of service in native royal courts (in other words, the middle-class residents of Lucknow), who came to play an increasingly visible and vocal role in the political, social and cultural life of the city.

In the colonial period, Lucknow remained an important urban centre, ranking fourth among the cities of India, after the three Presidency towns, and was the eighth-largest city of the British Empire in the 1880s (Oldenburg 1989). The changes that accompanied colonial rule also created circumstances favouring the emergence of a socially and politically significant middle class. For one, British rule helped destroy the political, material and ideological bases of the existing ruling classes in India. Political changes signalled the demise of a larger ruling class of nobles and intellectuals dependent upon the patronage of rulers and courts. Furthermore, not only were rajas or Nawabs stripped of political power, but missionary, evangelical and utilitarian critiques constantly undermined the legitimacy of the moral and cultural order supported by these rulers. Disruptions in traditional social and cultural hierarchies provided room for the emergence of a new leadership. These were the products of British-established schools and colleges who fashioned themselves as a middle class.

Even as this essay makes arguments which claim ground well beyond the city, it is important to keep in mind that there are also some important aspects in which the history of Lucknow is unique. Probably due to a different pattern of land tenure in the province, there was little of the *rentier* component in the social group which constituted itself as the middle class in Lucknow, as distinct from a city such as Calcutta (T. Sarkar 1994). Unlike the merchants of Surat, those of Lucknow kept a low profile in public affairs through the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Haynes 1991). Lucknow's history ensured that there was religious plurality, and possibilities of the creation of new sorts of public religious identities in the city, in a way that was distinct from, say, middle-class politics in the Madras Presidency (Irschick 1994). The continuing presence of a Nawabi ethos and the attempt of the British to then promote the Taluqdars as a new set of 'natural rulers' in the city also gave an anti-aristocratic edge to middle-class formation in Lucknow that was less visible in other urban centres in colonial India. At the same time, the issues that are at the centre of this essay were important not just to the middle class of colonial Lucknow, but to their contemporaries across colonial India, whether in Surat, Calcutta or Madras. Lucknow therefore serves as a site whose history helps question existing ideas about middle-class formation within British India, and suggests new ways of understanding this critically important social class and the new politics it unleashed in colonial India.

Taking to the training offered in educational institutions set up by the British, and using new forms of organization and communication, a younger generation of men began to emerge as adepts of Lucknow's public sphere in the late 19th century. They invested a great deal of their energy, time and money in setting up newspapers and associations that sought to represent the Indian public to the British rulers. This public sphere became the foremost site of middle-class formation in north India in the second half of the 19th century. It was here that they were fairly successful in recasting notions of respectability by undermining the habits, culture and pastimes associated with the older, aristocratic rulers of the city. It was in the public sphere that men (and somewhat later, women) from respectable service families of the pre-colonial era fashioned themselves as a middle class. They played a crucial role in defining what it meant to be 'modern'. Broadly defined, modernity in this sense refers to new models of organizing social, political and economic relations, which, we are told, draw their inspiration from the ideas of the Enlightenment and the material circumstances following from the triumph of industrial capitalism.

In colonial Lucknow, the middle class was both a product and the producer of modernity. It was the former because without the new professions, new institutions and the new notions of the importance of a category called the 'public' — all of which came to Lucknow with British rule — well-to-do men from 'service families' would never have fashioned themselves as a middle class. The power they acquired in colonial Lucknow was derived from being champions of modernity, and it was their efforts which created newer, modern forms of politics, culture, domesticity, and religion. In that sense, the middle class was also the producer of much that came to define modernity.

To highlight cultural projects as central to middle-class formation is not to deny the significance of either the economic structure or indeed the historical context of changes in the nature of legal and economic regimes that accompanied the transition to colonialism. The one objective factor that distinguished most of the people who came to be termed middle-class in colonial India was the fact that they belonged to the upper strata of society, without being at the very top. Most of them were upper-caste Hindus or *Ashraf* (high-born) Muslims, and many came from families and social groups which had traditionally served in the courts of indigenous rulers and large landlords. For the most part, they came from families which were financially comfortable, but not rich enough to not have to earn a living. This was one factor which distinguished them from the richest strata of Indian society, such as the large hereditary landlords or the remnants of an indigenous aristocracy. It also clearly put them well above the vast majority of India's poor.

Examining the rise of a middle class in colonial Lucknow, however, necessarily takes us beyond simple economic indicators of income and occupation in defining this social category. Though there were commonalities of social and economic background, it was not simply similarities in education, occupation or profession that made a middle class in colonial India. Nor was it traditional status alone that upper-caste Hindus or Ashraf Muslim men deployed to make distinctions between themselves and other social groups in colonial India. Rather, it was by transforming traditional cultural values and the basis of social hierarchy that a distinctive middle class emerged. It was not simply the objective circumstances of their existence that made a hitherto less significant group of intellectuals and bureaucrats key political and social figures. Rather, efforts of cultural entrepreneurship made the middle class a significant player in the social and political life of colonial India (Joshi 2001). In colonial India, as elsewhere around the world probably, a middle class emerged from processes where intellectuals and activists created a new and distinctive social category through a 'self conscious interposition between people of rank and the common people' (Williams 1976: 63).

The sort of imaginations that the middle class in India drew upon derived a great deal from models originating in Victorian Britain. Yet, given the circumstances they found themselves in, their constructions of the modern could not have been identical with the ideal-types of modernity established by European philosophers or other advocates of the middle class in England. A close investigation of the construction of an Indian middle class in a local milieu reveals multiple, often contradictory, pressures constituting middle-class politics in colonial India. It certainly demonstrates the extent to which 'traditional' ideas played a role in the construction of 'modern' ones about religion, community, gender relations, and the nation, propagated by the Indian middle class. Thus, the middle class's modern ideas about politics contained elements drawn from much older ideas about political and social organization. Their belief in modernization coexisted with the reinforcing of older hierarchies, and their belief in progress was simultaneous with their advocacy of tradition.

Examining the history of middle-class formation in one city allows us to nuance our reading of the concerns of middle-class activists. It also reveals that the process of middle-class formation, and particularly debates around the idea of cultural authenticity, are highly contested. Paralleling debates in other parts of the country, in Lucknow this contestation is represented as being played out between the followers of the *nai roshni* ('new light') who drew their inspiration from Western ideas *and* the more conservative elements (Russell 1992). In fact, the British rejection of their 'derivative' agenda may have been one of the reasons why, simultaneously with their agendas of social improvements derived from British Victorian norms, so many middle-class activists also exhorted a return to past traditions. The new caste associations of the middle class, even as they called for 'improving' social practices, lamented the loss of what they perceived as their original identity, and tried to return to imagined 'roots'. Kashmiri Pandits and Kayasthas, who were famous for their prowess in Urdu and Persian in courtly Lucknow, now chose to write their community journals in Hindi, and to learn Sanskrit (Joshi 2001: 96–131; Sender 1988). Muslim intellectuals like Hali wrote of the decline of Muslims in his famous *Musaddas*, urging them to rediscover their past glory (Minault 1986). Many of the social and political innovations of the period had to be cloaked as returns to tradition in order for them to gain widespread social acceptability (Indian National Social Conference 1890–1916; Sinha 1995).

Ideas of what can be called the 'old light' therefore remained a significant part of the middle-class agenda in colonial Lucknow. One significant difference between the generations who served at the courts of the Mughal or Nawabi rulers and the 19th-century men was that the latter were acutely, and at times painfully, made conscious of, and criticized for, their mimetic agenda. Like Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay in Calcutta, there were plenty of north Indian activists who lost no opportunity of reminding their fellow men — if indeed they were ever in danger of forgetting the fact — of the derivative nature of their ideas and social practices. Bankim's writings were frequently translated into Urdu or Hindi (Sharar 1989: 18; 'Suman' 1981: 504). But north India did not really need translations from Bengali to be made aware of the alien origins of much that they were advocating. Shivanath Sharma (ca. 1927) savagely lampooned the dress, eating habits and even newer ways of relieving oneself that the 'Babu' unthinkingly copied from his masters, while Sajjad Hussain did so through his satires in the *Oudh Punch* (Joshi 2001: 36, 54). Even a highly Westernized and England-trained barrister was critical of the 'anglicised Indian who . . . in his ardour for the present wants to cancel the whole past' (Dar 1921: 164).

But there were also very important areas where the agenda of the old- and new-light activists overlapped. Novelist Ratan Nath Sarshar has been regarded as one of the most ardent and uncritical enthusiasts of emulating the ways of the British rulers of India. Ralph Russell mentions an instance where Sarshar apparently pointed to the sight of an English couple eating mutton chops at seven in the morning as a sign of the superiority of the English way of life (Russell 1992: 89)! However, a more nuanced reading of Sarshar's work reveals another agenda underlying his concerns and those of the other supporters of the 'new light' in colonial north India. In what first appears to be another example of pointing to the superiority of the British way of life, Sarshar's novel *Fasana-i-Azad* has his protagonist Azad visit two localities in a town, probably Lucknow. One is a European enclave in the city, and the other an Indian neighbourhood. Azad compares clean, healthy European children, playing on horseback, with those living in the filthy Indian locality, lamenting how the latter could never grow up to be strong and powerful. He contrasts the former neighbourhood with its well-organized library where people come to learn about the world with the latter, where he only finds dissipated young men who lack education and prefer to order their lives to the beat of the drums of the dancing girls (Premchand 1987: 55). There is, of course, unabashed admiration for the British here, but also the expression of a desire for 'natives' to grow up to be as strong and powerful as the rulers. In the world of Sarshar and his fellow supporters of the 'new light', for example, in the writings of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, the exhortations to emulate also point to a desire for achieving a level of equality with the British.

One notices a similar agenda at work in the writings of Abdul Halim Sharar, who, in contrast to Sarshar, is best known for his nostalgic set of essays on the history and culture of Lucknow during the reign of the Nawabs. Sharar was a man of many parts. In addition to running a literary journal, he also wrote revisionist histories and historical novels, particularly on Islamic themes, which glorified Muslim heroes and heroines pitted against perfidious Christian villains (Russell 1992: 10; Sharar 1989: 20–22). With his nostalgia for the era of the Nawabs and his championing of Islamic heroes against Christian villains in the era of British rule, Sharar appears to be fairly typical of the supporters of the 'old light'. Yet, along with all his nostalgia for the past, and his desire to glorify some aspects of it, Sharar also provides us with one of the most scathing critiques of the indolence in Nawabi Lucknow, very much in the vein of the critics of the 'new light'. Sharar wrote:

> In the days of prosperity when most citizens were either of the nobility or supported by them, ideas of effort, toil and the value of time had no meaning in Lucknow society. The frivolous occupations they pursued led them further and further from the path of progress. Free from the worries of earning a livelihood, they did nothing except amuse themselves and turned to pigeon flying, quail fighting, dice throwing, card games and chess . . . There were few noblemen who were not addicted to these idle pursuits and none who was not interested in them. No one thought of the future. (Sharar 1989: 192)

Given that this critique comes as part of a text that is otherwise a fond description of the Lucknow of the Nawabs, Sharar can hardly be accused of being a single-minded critic of the Nawabi era. What Sharar resents, in retrospect, is the failure of Nawabi society to face the challenge posed by the British. In this respect, even Sharar demonstrates considerable appreciation for many of the traits of the British. Telling the story of the British conquest of India, and of the annexation of Awadh, Sharar argues that the qualities of the English made such a conquest virtually inevitable:

> British people's far-sightedness, efficiency and forbearance were day by day proving that they were entitled to reap the fruits of their efforts and their advanced civilization. It was impossible for the intelligence of these foreigners and their good planning and methodical ways not to prevail against the ignorance and self-effacement of India. (Sharar 1989: 62)

Modernists and traditionalists, supporters of the new light and the old, appear to be motivated by similar concerns of equality and respect. These concerns drove some to emulate the British in all respects, and others to reject the idea of mimicking the ways of the rulers, and to reaffirm the 'nativism' of their agenda. In most cases, however — as demonstrated by Sharar and Sarshar, for instance — it is really impossible to clearly demarcate the two, given the extent to which the same people articulated both 'modern' and 'traditional' ideas. We see then that men like Sharar, Sarshar and Bishan Narain Dar engaged simultaneously in multiple projects of respectability, deploying ideas of the new light as well as of the old.

The men of the old light and the new were both products of a modern world and shared, among other things, ideas of equality between the rulers and the ruled. This modern understanding brought together reformers and revivalists in their quest to gain a degree of respect in the public sphere. Despite demonstrating significant internal differences, this contradictory modernity was certainly a hallmark of middle-class politics. It was also these ideas that helped distinguish the middle class from the other social groups in colonial Lucknow. Traditional binaries between 'reformists' and 'revivalists', proponents of the 'new light' and those of the 'old light', or, for that matter, newer historiographical binaries between the 'inner' and the 'outer' spheres, take us only so far in understanding the politics of the time.

The contradictions of middle-class politics emerged from the contrary pulls of its social situation. On the one hand, ideas and institutions that came with colonial rule allowed the members of this class to represent themselves as enlightened representatives of public opinion, through which they sought to replace the older, aristocratic paradigm of respectability in Lucknow. On the other hand, it was equally important for men who were traditionally a part of respectable society to also clearly distinguish themselves from the lower orders. In doing the latter, they could not but use a more 'traditional' vocabulary with which they were quite familiar given their respectable status in pre-colonial Lucknow, and thus emphasize the inherent inferiority of the lower classes. While this duality certainly allowed them to emerge as the opinion makers in Lucknow, it also limited their agenda in that middle-class politics continued to retain a profound ambivalence about popular politics, which it sought to 'discipline and mobilize' (R. Guha 1992) rather than persuade and include in its political endeavours.

Taking into account new ideas about gender relations makes the social origins of the contradictions in middle-class positions even more apparent. Middle-class interventions constructed a new ideology of gender relations, which deployed new ideas about the equality of the sexes and the importance of education and modern training for women, but they also used a much older vocabulary drawn from the ideology of *stridharma*, which can best be described as 'husband-worship'. This stitching together of older and newer ideas created a modern full of tensions and different possibilities. While this modernity allowed for a certain disciplining of women, it also provided opportunities for critiques of patriarchy. Limits framed by their own middle-class lifestyles, moreover, prevented middle-class women from breaking completely with the discourse on gender relations created by a patriarchal modernity. Even middle-class feminist politics therefore continued to maintain a relationship with 'modernity' and 'tradition' which was at least as ambivalent as that of the men.

The contradictions of the middle class, evident in their ideas about religion and the nation, reflect the contrary pulls arising from the circumstances of their existence rather than any conscious effort at duplicity or deception. The new religiosity of the middle class was not a guise or cover for some other 'real' political interest. However, the modern religiosity that they sought to construct revealed the contradictions of their social, political and intellectual agenda. Similarly, their oscillation between 'secular' and 'religious' nationalism was not simply a political tactic, but a product of the fact that in the 1920s both secular and religious imaginings were equally critical to middle-class nationalism. These contradictions too limited middle-class politics, both allowing them a more significant presence in the political arena, yet circumscribing the extent to which they could take their 'reformist', 'nationalist' or 'revivalist' agenda.

Middle-class activists sought to be 'modern', but their own social positions meant that they would use the resources of tradition to construct that modernity. This was not simply as a result of their being a colonized people, though colonialism undoubtedly inflected their modernity. Looked upon from the perspective of an ideal-typical modernity, the politics of the middle class of colonial Lucknow would be found wanting. They were not egalitarian enough to perceive the lower social orders as equal citizens. They were not even liberal enough to allow women from their own class equality within the home. They were not secular enough to keep away from Hindu nationalist imaginings of the nation. How, then, are we to understand these contradictions, especially given that they come from a class that so consciously sought to emulate the model of a progressive, egalitarian, liberal and secular middle class?

One way of trying to understand these contradictions of middle-class politics is to point to the impossibility of a 'true' modernity in a world peopled by *homo hierarchicus*, as Louis Dumont's work has suggested, echoing the sentiments of many generations of Orientalist scholars and colonial administrators before him (Dumont 1970; but see also Appadurai 1988; Dirks 1992; van der Veer 1993). Do these contradictions, alternatively, prove right those critics who argue against using the category of middle class in Indian history altogether? Or, should we follow the lead offered by Partha Chatterjee (1997), among some other scholars of the Subaltern Studies collective, and trace the contradictions of the Indian middle class to the colonial milieu which compelled it to define its modernity in ways very different from that of the West? Underlying all these questions, ostensibly about the peculiarities of the Indian case, are comparisons between the failures, lacks, or deviations of the Indian case, and certain 'originary' models of middle-classness. To try to answer such questions, then, we too need to undertake a comparative exercise — to contrast the Indian experience with the metropolitan middle class that operates as the standard against which this Indian case is being implicitly judged.

Making real comparisons

Even a cursory examination of the literature on the middle class in England, for instance, reveals a significant variation between a messy and complicated historical reality on the one hand and the model of a progressive, enlightened middle class emerging 'like the rising sun' out of the Industrial Revolution on the other (Wahrman 1995: 1). Such scholarship, for one, questions the causal connection between rapid industrialization and the emergence of a 'middle-class society'. But it also reveals that public-sphere interventions were critical in establishing certain myths about middle-class formation, which now stand as models against which non-Western historical developments are judged (Owensby 1999). General surveys of European history, moreover, reveal that much like the case of Lucknow, hierarchy was very much a part of the domestic as well as the public life of the mid- to late-19th-century European bourgeoisie. Eric Hobsbawm notes that the ideas about representative government, and about civil rights and liberties, were a part of the political vocabulary of the middle class, but only so long as they were 'compatible with the rule of law and with the kind of order which kept the poor in their place' (Hobsbawm 1989: 287). If we take into account attitudes towards women, children and servants, then 'the structure of the bourgeois family flatly contradicted that of bourgeois [public] society' (ibid.: 280). In fact, Hobsbawm goes on to argue, a sense of superiority was central to the constitution of the bourgeois man, and 'the monopoly of command — in his house, in his business, in his factory — was crucial to his self definition' (ibid.: 288). Evidently, then, concerns with empowerment and the retention of older (albeit transformed) social prejudices were as much characteristic of the European middle classes as they were of those in India.

These are, of course, fairly well-known facts about European 19th-century history, and could well be elaborated upon in more detail. The model of a liberal, democratic, progressive middle class which seizes power from a decadent, enfeebled feudal order to reorder society and politics along the lines suggested by the *philosophes* of the Enlightenment is a myth which has been repeatedly undermined by the historians of Europe (Blackbourn and Eley 1984; Mayer 1981; Maza 2003). The really interesting part about all of this, of course, is that even masses of counter-factual examples have not dented the power and persistence of this model. Thus, despite recognizing differences between different European middle classes, despite acknowledging the importance of self-constitution in the making of this class, despite surveying literature that points to the persistence and power of older ideas, institutions and classes in European society in the 'long 19th century', a review article on the subject concludes that the existence of the middle classes in Europe depended on 'certain historical constellations, among them the tradition of the Enlightenment', which were specific to European history (Kocka 1995: 806, and *passim*).

One can dismiss this as yet another example of Eurocentric historiography, but the issues that such reviews raise are of greater significance simply because of the assumptions which underlie Kocka's understanding of history, and their implications for those of us who happen to work on non-European histories. If the import of such essays was simply to point to the specificity of historical experience in different parts of the world, there would be no reason to disagree. However, despite recognizing the regional variations within Europe, the different meanings and political valency that equivalent words carry in different European languages, and even the fact that the category in fact has been used 'as a polemical or affirmative code word in public debates', Kocka affirms the existence of a pan-European middle class (Kocka 1995: 783). What allows him to do this, despite plenty of evidence to the contrary even from the authors he reviews in his essay, is the notion of a shared liberal tradition to be traced back to the European Enlightenment, which apparently makes industrialists and professionals, living under different economic and political circumstances across a large continent, 'a middle class'. 'It is not very likely', Jurgen Kocka concludes, 'that they will be found in many other parts of the world' (ibid.: 806).

The history of Lucknow certainly does not suggest that the colonial context created a middle class and a modernity that was different enough from that of the West as to forbid comparative exercises altogether (Joshi 2001). One important similarity that we can note between the Indian and English middle classes is that, in both cases, a small and relatively privileged group of men and, later, women, made their distinctions from other social strata by virtue of being the representatives of a modern social order. There is no doubt that middle-class visions of modernity in India were contradictory.

Thus, the modern politics unleashed by the middle class in colonial India simultaneously spoke in the voice of reason *and* sentiment; emphasized the need to preserve tradition *and* initiate radical change; advocated liberty *and* authoritarianism; and equality *and* hierarchy. All the public-sphere projects of the middle class were shot through with these inconsistencies and contradictions, which were constitutive of middle-class politics, indeed of the modernity which they initiated in colonial India. Yet, such anomalies were not unique to the Indian case.

There is little doubt that the exclusion of the lower orders of society from participating in the public sphere, as in many other aspects of the modern that was created by the middle classes in Lucknow, drew upon assumptions based on an older hierarchical tradition of social relations. Nevertheless, this was hardly a unique prerogative of the middle classes of colonial Lucknow, or, for that matter, of colonial India. Their European counterparts too had little room for women or lower classes in the public they represented. Like the European bourgeois public sphere examined by Habermas, theoretically, the public sphere of colonial north India was a forum open to all. But practically, both public spheres were the province of literary adepts who set or could follow new norms of public conduct (La Vopa 1992). Given the class and gender exclusionary nature of bourgeois practice, Habermas's model of the public sphere has been assessed 'as an ideal of critical liberalism that remains historically unattained' (Eley 1993: 289). A contradictory historical practice, at odds with the ideology of egalitarianism it propagated, remained at the heart of the public sphere in both cases. For much the same reasons as their European counterparts, the Indian middle class too, initially, excluded subaltern groups, and based this exclusion on the presumed natural inferiority of these groups, or excluded them on account of their lack of education on matters of public import. Both in Europe and India, the public sphere thus became the site where, for the most part, educated professional men constructed a highly gendered, exclusive and hierarchical middle class.

The exclusion, marginalization and recasting of women through institutions of the public sphere is yet another instance of the way in which this quintessentially modern institution worked in comparable ways in India and Europe. Joan Landes (1988) made a forceful case for the way in which the public sphere was gendered at the moment of its production in revolutionary France. Though there were certainly important differences created by difference in time and place, one can see, for instance, a parallel in the marginalization of the courtesans of Lucknow and the aristocratic women of the *salons* of pre-revolutionary France, as a new gendered public sphere emerged in both contexts. Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall's work also demonstrates some important parallels in the way the emergence of public associations 'increased the confidence of middle-class men and contributed to their claims to political power', and deliberately excluded women from this public world. In fact, the authors argue that the power and confidence of middle-class men was predicated upon their position 'as heads of households, representing their wives, children, servants, and other dependents' (Davidoff and Hall 1991: 416). This rich study of the making of a middle class in 19th-century England has as its main focus family life and new ideologies of domesticity, which became an integral part of the formation of a gendered middle-class world. Parallels between the ideals articulated in domestic manuals in colonial Lucknow or Calcutta and the didactic literature aimed at the inculcation of new ideas of domesticity in 19th-century England are quite striking (S. Bannerjee 2004; S. Gupta 1954; Joshi 2001; Malhotra 2002).

The point of these comparisons is not to suggest an identity between two quite dissimilar contexts. There were important differences in the historical and cultural contexts of the groups who constituted themselves as middle-class in Birmingham and Lucknow, as indeed there were between the middle classes of Lucknow and, say, Calcutta, Madras or Surat, which did not have quite the same history of either British occupation or indeed the recent history of an indigenous ruling elite as Lucknow. The important position occupied by merchants in Surat as opposed to those in Lucknow, where the richer merchants had historically kept a low profile, is just one instance of these differences (Haynes 1991; Oldenburg 1989; Sahai 1973). The objective, then, is not to claim that middle classes across the world were identical, but to point to the similarities in the nature of middle-class modernities constructed in different parts of the world; to point to the extent to which all such politics deviated from the ideal-type usually attributed to a 'hyper-real Europe'.

Rather than reinforce the binary oppositions between the West and the rest, the comparisons suggest that we take into account the extent to which serious social historians of Western modernity themselves point out that middle-class ideas involved a 'jostling together of the concepts of liberty with those of patronage and deference . . . [and] the contradictory ways in which purer discourses of philosophers and ideologues are reworked within common sense' (Davidoff and Hall 1991: 16). The best instance, perhaps, of such jostling can be seen in the role of religion in the formation of a modern class and the modern nation. The presence of religion in the politics of the public sphere is normatively regarded as a failure of modernity, or its lack. Religion, by its modern definition, if we follow Talal Asad (1993), should remain confined to the private realm. When religion refuses to behave in its appointed role, it is usually dismissed with labels like 'fundamentalism' or 'communalism' which question the modernity, if not the morality (are they really that different?), of the practitioners of such politics. Western commentators on Indian history or politics have found it easy to dismiss such politics as the result of the 'primitive' or 'primordial' attachments of the non-Western peoples, and such ahistorical stereotypes have been reinforced by representations in contemporary media (Dumont 1970; Ludden 1996; G. Pandey 1990). This, of course, is the ideal-type of modernity. Lived reality has been considerably different. Davidoff and Hall point to the centrality of the Church in the production of middle-class identities in Britain, and identify 'religious belonging' as 'a central plinth of middle-class culture' (Davidoff and Hall 1991: 73). Though the narrative of modernization emphasizes the decline of religion and the growing secularization of society as essential to the emergence of the 'modern West', recent scholarship questions such assumptions. There is, on the one hand, Jose Casanova's work (1994) on the place of religion in modern society, which points out that 'deprivatized' religion can, under certain circumstances, have a formative role to play in modern politics. Peter van der Veer (1999) has warned against accepting the secularization thesis too easily by pointing to the important role played by Evangelical Christianity and the revival of Roman Catholicism in producing the modern subject and shaping political culture in Victorian Britain. He, in fact, makes a case for arguing that modernity was 'sacralized' at the moment of its production, not just in India, but also in Europe.

Once we accept that modernity in the West, despite its ideal-type representations, did not automatically usher in a new secular order, but was indeed constituted by existing religious discourses, then the case for Indian exceptionalism — whether based on backwardness and primordialism, or guided by the intent of demonstrating the radical heterogeneity of a colonial modernity — becomes weaker. Rather than viewing the Lucknow middle-class's religiosity as a lack or failure, where they strove for and ultimately failed to achieve the secular–modern ideal, we can look at them as active producers as well as products of a sacralized modernity which, in turn, produced a modernized religiosity in colonial India. This was a modernity shaped by their own concerns and contexts, and their rhetoric and politics were in turn shaped by it. Religion, or rather self-definitions based on religious categories, became a critical part of the modern self created by the colonial middle class. This self-definition also helped shape the later political commitment to a more militant anti-Muslim Hindu nationalism. Rather than a lack of modernity, therefore, there is a good case to be made for understanding the place of religion in the political discourse of colonial Lucknow as the product of a fractured modernity that the Lucknow middle class shared with its counterparts in Europe and other parts of the world.

Based on this comparison, it seems that neither India nor the West actually live up to the ideal-typical model of modernity. Given the similarities between the experience of historical modernities in India, the West and indeed other parts of the world as well, it seems that we do need to reconceptualize this model. Our study of the middle class of Lucknow and the comparison of the contradictions in their politics with similar phenomena elsewhere suggests that despite a more or less singular ideal-type of modernity derived from a very selective reading of a 'Western' historical experience, in practice, 'modern' politics and social relations always reveal their fractures and disarticulations. It was a 'fractured modernity' that created the circumstances for and set limits to the various cultural and political projects of the middle class in colonial India. Looking at how the middle classes were constituting themselves and the world around them in colonial India, therefore, not only presents an opportunity to better understand the nature of modernity in India, but also helps formulate a category to comprehend this phenomenon in other parts of the world.

This is not to say that the idea of a fractured modernity is novel. At least two generations of nationalist, Marxist and, now, Saidian scholarship has made us aware of the ways in which the self-styled representatives of Western modernity in the colonies revealed the illiberal stratum of ideas, practices and institutions that comprised their modernity. It is, however, more recently that these histories are being used to question the categories upon which so much of colonialism itself rested. Frederick Cooper and Ann Stoler argue that colonial projects 'showed up the fundamental contradictions inherent in bourgeois projects and the way universal claims were bound up in particularistic assertions' (Cooper and Stoler 1997: 3). Paul Gilroy, in his fascinating study of the 'Black Atlantic' (1993), suggests a more fundamental reconsideration of the category, one that would put slavery and terror at the very heart of any definition of modernity. Ann Stoler's own work on colonialism and sexuality (1995), along with many others' works (see, for instance, Burton 1999), demonstrates that much of what we know of modern bourgeois identities was formed in relation to colonial encounters in which ideas of racial distinctions were central. Uday Mehta goes as far as to argue that ideas about race were built into the philosophy of 18th-century liberalism itself (Mehta 1997). Middle-class Englishmen excluded women as well as non-white people from the benefits of liberalism, which they clearly deployed for their own empowerment (C. Hall 1992). Antoinette Burton's work, on the other hand, shows us the extent to which British feminism, drawing upon the legacy of liberalism and modernity to shape its concerns, was deployed to empower middle-class British women at the expense of Indian women (Burton 1994). In all these cases, a close examination of the discourse of modernity deployed reveals its illiberal and perhaps non-modern sub-strata.

The point of this comparative exercise is not to argue that there was nothing new in the post-Enlightenment age; quite the opposite, in fact. The changes that allowed for the questioning of age-old privileges based on race, gender, class, and religion signalled a huge transformation in politics and society in the West as well as the non-Western world. The very rise to significance of the social group that termed itself 'middle class' in Lucknow was the product of real changes that drew upon the rhetoric of the post-Enlightenment age. The point of my argument, then, is to allow historians of the middle class in the non-Western world the space to examine the achievements and limitations of their social and political formations without remaining trapped in comparative models that contrast an unrealized ideal-type with more messy historical realities. The point, therefore, is to destabilize the categories derived from a selective reading of Western history — in other words, to provincialize Europe. Moreover, I would suggest that one does not have to abandon comparative history altogether in this endeavour. One does not necessarily have to dichotomize the historical experience of the West and the rest, because this strategy may itself reinforce ideas of an originary, unfractured and monolithic Western modernity and its derivative, and hence necessarily lesser, non-Western counterparts. This essay suggests an alternative: closely examining the construction of modernity in a specific context, it shows that far from being a totalizing or monolithic ideology, modernity in colonial India was built upon an existing set of ideas, which it transformed in new ways. Emerging through the public sphere, this modernity was very much the product of middle-class activists, and reflected the contrary pressures constituting that class. Deploying their cultural capital to maximum effect, middle-class men were able to transform existing ideas of social conduct, cultural preferences and politics in ways that allowed them to emerge as the representatives and leaders of Indian society. Middle-class ideas, though they were certainly novel, were not a monolith. Not only were there competing opinions on issues among the middle class, a close examination of middle-class ideas reveals a number of contradictions: their modern ideas about politics contained elements drawn from much older and hierarchical ideas about political and social organization; their belief in secularism coexisted with the importance of religious identities; their belief in progress was simultaneous with their advocacy of tradition; their nationalism was complicit with what has been termed 'communalism'.

A comparison with the modernities of the Western and other parts of the non-Western world suggests that similar, though obviously not identical, fractures, contradictions and anomalies were constitutive of modern ideas, institutions and practices there too. In Lucknow, as in other parts of the world, modernity was built with a variety of resources, including much that modernity labels either 'traditional' or 'non-modern'. The traditional and the non-modern, whether it is in the form of patriarchal ideas, racism, notions of patronage and deference, or religion, never quite disappears, but does become a resource for the modern. Moreover, if, following the example of Lucknow, we recognize the deployment of the ideal-typical modernity more as a strategy of empowerment over various others than as a reflection of lived reality, then we can also better understand its evident contradictions. To enforce or maintain power over subordinate groups — whether it was the middle class over the lower classes in the public sphere of Lucknow; the Europeans over the colonized natives, or indeed over their 'own' working classes; the Hindu middle class over Muslims; or British feminists over their Indian sisters — it became necessary in certain situations to also resort to the darker side of the discourse of modernity, to take recourse to the language of race, hierarchy and 'communalism' over that of egalitarianism, improvement, liberal nationalism and global sisterhood. Understanding the fractured nature of middle-class modernity certainly helps us better understand (and perhaps better contest the inequities of) a world where the ideals of that middle-class modernity play such an important role in determining social policy as well as the norms of civic and political life.

Concluding remarks

We see then that comparisons have been central to any discussion of the middle class in colonial India. For the most part, the comparisons have been unfavourable. Colonial officials and intellectuals had good reason to disparage the aspirations of the upwardly mobile Western-educated men, and did so frequently. But even middle-class Indians held many reservations, to a large extent centred around the notion of their lack of authenticity. Of course, there was change over time. There was a huge difference, for instance, between Jawaharlal Nehru's critique of the middle class (which was to be redeemed by Gandhi's notion of hyper-authenticity so as to enable members of this class to be true nationalists) and the much less confident debates between the advocates of wholesale Westernization and neo-conservatives in the 19th century. But colonialists and nationalists alike implicitly or explicitly compared the Indian middle class with what they all believed was an authentic model of middle-classness originating in the West. Today, the Indian middle class is much more confident in its pronouncements. Yet, on a variety of issues, ranging from traffic and hygiene to consumption, cosmetics and marriages, even this otherwise self-confident middle class suffers the residual anxieties that they don't quite measure up to certain Western standards of middle-classness. In comparison, even the contemporary middle class is not quite there.

This leads us to ask: But compared to what? Comparison, as this essay has attempted to show, can really be a two-way street. A historical examination of the middle-class politics of colonial Lucknow certainly reveals the many contradictory positions that middle-class activists took on a variety of subjects, ranging from their attitudes towards subordinate social groups to the place of religion in politics. But rather than accept the idea that there is in fact an authentic, originary middle-class modernity, against which we must compare Lucknow's modernity and find it wanting, a historical comparison reveals that in lived, historical experience, similar contradictions bedevilled the politics of the Western middle classes too. Thus, instead of dichotomizing our modernity and theirs, I suggest that a better way of 'provincializing Europe' is by highlighting the fractured nature of modernity itself. Rather than seeing the operation of modern politics in India as yet another case of Indian exceptionalism, this essay argues that modernity in India was neither inadequately modern nor a special-case scenario of a 'colonial modernity'. The middle-class shapers of modernity in colonial India worked in ways that were similar to those of their counterparts in other parts of the world, including the West. Cultural projects of becoming middle-class ensured that they used a variety of resources to construct notions of 'being modern' that emulated, but were also at variance with, the ideal-type. In other words, their modernities were inherently fractured. Examining the emergence of a middle class in India, and wrestling with modernity from the margins, not only allows us to comprehend the apparent inconsistencies of middle-class politics in the colonial milieu, but perhaps also suggests a theoretical framework to better understand the working of modern politics in much of the world today.

5

From Landed Class to Middle Class: Rajput Adaptation in Rajasthan

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Our story about how the Rajputs in Rajasthan were transformed from a landed class to middle class begins with the demise of India's 'old regime'. However different the origin, process and outcome between the fate of the old regime in France and India, Tocqueville's magisterial *The Old Regime and the French Revolution* (1998) raised important questions about the transition from monarchy and aristocracy to democracy, questions that have helped us frame our narrative. India's old regime was exemplified by the Rajput princes and nobles of Rajasthan. Their fate stands in marked contrast to that of the old regime in France. In the run up to the revolution, Voltaire raised the cry '*ecrasez l'infame*' (eradicate the infamy),[1] an option that the Jacobins took literally when they ended the old regime by using the guillotine to decapitate the king and many aristocrats. In India, the old regime was brought to a close by persuasion, not violence, and became a part of the new democratic order.

When the old regime in India was brought to a close, how did its princes and noblemen adapt to the loss of their kingdoms, titles and estates? In the language of the time, Independence in 1947 brought an end to 'paramountcy', the princes' sovereign relationship of 'subordinate cooperation' with the British crown (Rudolph and Rudolph 1984a), and led to 'the integration of the princely states' (Menon 1956) into the Union of India. Most of the 22 princely states that went into the making of the post-Independence Indian state of Rajasthan were ruled by Rajputs,[2] the Kshatriya or warrior-ruler *varna* (caste status order) of classical Hindu texts (Doniger with Smith 1991).[3]

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[1] Voltaire was referring to the teachings of the Catholic Church but, for some, 'infamy' encompassed the monarchy and the aristocracy.

[2] From the Sanskrit *rajaputra*, son of a king. Rajputs have been compared to other feudal-status orders such as the Junkers of Prussia and the Samurai of Japan.

On 3 June 1947, the last Viceroy, Lord Louis Mountbatten, announced that on 15 August paramountcy would 'lapse'; the rulers of India's kingdoms would no longer be recognized as sovereign by the British Crown. Left in a legal and political limbo, they would remain kings in name only. By Independence Day, 564 princes, including those from Rajasthan, had, with a few exceptions, been persuaded, pressured and sometimes threatened by Mountbatten, the Indian Home and States Minister, Vallabhbhai Patel, and the States Secretary to Government, V. P. Menon to sign instruments of accession with the Government of India. India's princes were promised respect, privy purses and privileges. This marked the beginning of an era of royalty without monarchy in Rajasthan.

About half the land in the 22 princely states that became the state of Rajasthan on 30 March 1949 was held by *jagirdar*s (feudal landed aristocrats who collected the revenue and provided local government). Land reform began soon after Rajasthan came into existence. It took the form of *jagir* (feudal estate) 'resumption', the theory being that jagirs had been granted by the rulers of the princely states and could be resumed, with compensation, by their successor, the Government of Rajasthan (Rudolph and Rudolph 1984b). Land reform ousted the jagirdars from their dominant social, political and economic position in state and society. Like Rajasthan's princes who ceased to rule, Rajasthan's landed aristocracy ceased to be a governing class. Both lost much of their property and sources of income. Unlike France and Russia, the old regime in Rajasthan was not so much destroyed as retired in much diminished circumstances. In time it experienced a second coming by providing the aura of royalty, ancient kingdoms and heroic history that would make Rajasthan a leading tourist destination.

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[3] The four varnas are Brahmins (priests and intellectuals who cultivated knowledge of the sacred texts); Kshatriyas (warrior rulers in charge of security and law and order); Vaishyas (merchants responsible for commercial life); and Shudras (cultivators, craftsmen and labourers). Below and outside the varna status order based on purity and pollution are the *mlechha*s ('barbarians' or strangers) regarded by those within the varna status order as untouchables (Doniger with Smith 1991).

In what follows, we explore how the Rajputs of Rajasthan's old regime adapted to their new circumstances. Our account is about how they made the transition from a royal and aristocratic landed class to a hybrid middle class. Adaptation came in phases: first middle-class politics, then middle-class occupations. When we speak of Rajput adaptation, we have in mind exemplary rather than typical stories. For example, 'big' Rajputs — Rajputs with forts, palaces and mansions that could be made into heritage hotels — were better positioned to make the transition to a middle-class existence than those without such means. But the transition to middle-class occupations was not confined to being a businessman in charge of a heritage hotel. Many Rajputs, like the *chhote bhaiyen* (younger brothers) of old, have learned to acquire qualifications and live by their talents and wits. We have been using the term class, as in middle class, without saying where it came from and what it might mean. Before analyzing how Rajputs made the transition from landed class to middle class, we want to locate class as a term and a mode of analysis.

Excursus on the languages of social difference: Locating the term 'middle class' in India

How should we think about the term 'middle class'? We turn for help to Raymond Williams. His *Culture and Society, 1780–1950* (1983) broke new ground in helping to understand where the term 'class' came from and what it came to mean. He traces its various versions and manifestations from its origins in late 18th-century England, across the 19th century and into the immediate post-World War II era. Williams's method is to examine the language used in an emergent public sphere. He shows how variants of class as a noun, e. g., middle class, and as an adjective, e. g., class struggle, became the dominant discourse of the public sphere. We contrast Williams's vocabulary of class in England and in Europe more broadly with vocabularies of social difference in other times and places — medieval and renaissance Europe, classical and Mughal India. We do so in order to introduce and make intelligible our story of Rajput adaptation.

It is in this context that Williams says that the word 'class' can be dated, in its most important modern sense, from about 1772

(Williams 1983: xv). Before 1772, class referred to a division or group in schools and colleges. It is at the end of the 18th century that class in its social sense began to be built up. The first usage was 'lower classes', which joined the earlier term, 'lower orders'. The term 'higher classes' made its appearance in the 1790s, and was soon joined by 'middle classes' and 'middling classes'. Roughly from 1815 we got 'working classes'. The 'upper classes' were not heard of until much later, in the 1890s, and the 'lower middle classes' much later still, in the early 20th century.

Williams is quick to point out that 'this spectacular history of the new use of *class*' does not mean that England was without a vocabulary of social difference before 1772. Shakespeare spoke of 'rank, order and degree': 'Take but degree away, untune that string, and hark, what discord follows!'[4] And medieval Christian Europe assumed that there was

> a great chain of being . . . Every being in creation was thought to have its place within the chain, which entailed a certain degree of authority and a certain degree of responsibility to the rest of the Chain. As long as each being knew its place and did its destined duty for the rest of the chain, all would be well.[5]

Williams' narrative of class misses an important transitional concept between rank, order and degree, and class, that of the English gentleman. The idea of the gentleman opened the way to achieved status. While birth mattered, one could become or at least be taken to be a gentleman. Character, manners and conduct defined a gentleman. The 18th century in England witnessed the democratization of gentlemanly culture and standing that preceded the shift from a society of hierarchically closed ranks and orders to one of relatively open classes. Daniel Defoe and other 18th-century pamphleteers who wrote on class and manners provided the English with popular literary instruction in the art of becoming and being a gentleman. By celebrating being a gentleman, they facilitated the expansion of the ideal to those previously excluded from the fold.[6]

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[4] The Shakespeare quote is from Ulysses's speech before Agamemnon's tent in *Troilus & Cressida* I iii, 85–94; 101–8; 109–10. The speech can be read at http://absoluteshakespeare.com/plays/troilus_and_cressida/a3s3.htm (accessed 7 March 2008).

[5] 'The Chain of Being', http://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/Tillyard01.html (accessed 7 March 2008).

If Williams seems to have missed or ignored the term gentleman as a way of indicating social difference in 18th-century England, he is right in arguing that class provided 'a more indefinite word than *rank*, and this was probably one of the reasons for its introduction' (Williams 1983: xv) after 1772. In this sense, it better captures 'the changed social structure, and the changed social feelings, of an England which was passing through the Industrial Revolution, and which was at a crucial phase in the development of political democracy' (ibid.).

A difference insufficiently emphasized by both Williams and Defoe is that between those in 'commerce' or 'trade' and those whose income derived from the land. Nineteenth-century British novels abound in stories in which the difference is both crucial and overcome. Persons in 'trade', that is, commercially marked persons, are at one and the same time inferior to landed gentry and aristocrats and, as the distribution of wealth and income tilts against the latter and in favour of those in trade, necessary to their survival. Manufacturers', retailers' and beer-brewers' daughters with fortunes became desirable marriage partners. George Nathaniel Curzon, from a landed gentry family that traced its ancestry back to 12th-century Normans and who became Viceroy of India, married Mary Leitner, an American heiress whose father helped found the Marshall Field department store. The distinction between types of wealth is an element in the differentiation of the 'middle class' from the gentry and the aristocracy.[7]

But how did the middle class, which began with a class below (the lower class) and later a class above (the upper class), become a 'stand-alone class', a class without a class above or one below, i. e., defined more by culture rather than by structure? Paradoxically, it was Karl Marx, whose theory of capitalism brought class structure and class conflict to its apogee, who opened the way to the stand-alone middle-class historic outcome. This leads us to ask: How could this have been?

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[6] In the paragraph about the English gentleman, we have borrowed freely from our book (Rudolph and Rudolph 1967: 113–14). The works of Defoe are replete with instruction on how to become a gentleman and celebrate the idea. Defoe's death register reads 'Mr Defoe, Gentleman'.

[7] This relationship is illuminated from the early 19th to the early 20th century in the novels of Jane Austen and Anthony Trollope and in H. G. Wells' *Tono Bungay* (1909).

In 1867 Marx published volume I of *Capital*, but it wasn't until 14 years after his death in 1883, when his colleague and friend, Friedrich Engels, published volume 3 of *Capital* from Marx's notes, that we got a glimpse of what Marx had in mind by the term 'class'. The only place Marx discusses class as such is in the last unfinished chapter of volume 3. The account ends after a few brief paragraphs, beginning as follows, with Marx answering the question 'what constitutes a class?':

> The owners merely of labour power, owners of capital and landowners, whose respective sources of income are wages, profit and ground rent, in other words, wage labourers, capitalists, and landowners, constitute the three big classes of modern society based on the capitalist means of production. (Marx 1978: 441)

As André Béteille astutely observes, Marx's scheme is based on a dichotomy, owners and non-owners of the means of production, that leaves out the salaried middle class and the peasantry. The middle class, Béteille argues,

> does not form part of Marx's analytic scheme of the three great classes of modern society. Yet its demographic, economic, social and political significance is undeniable. It has grown steadily in size and complexity not only in the industrially advanced countries of West Europe and North America, but also in the post-colonial societies of Asia and Africa, including India. (Béteille 2007: 289)

And it has grown 'without a class above and one below it'.[8]

If the historical career of class, particularly of the middle class, began in late 18th-century England in the context of an emergent 'industrial revolution' and reached its apogee in the hands of Karl Marx at the end of the 19th century (when the industrial revolution was at this peak), when and how did the concept of class come to India? First, what vocabularies of social difference did it challenge? Indian society is notorious for its diversities, not least diverse vocabularies of social difference. The *ur* text is probably the

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[8] Béteille explains the growth of a 'stand alone middle class', i.e., a class without a class above or below it, by arguing that 'we find . . . a steady and continuous increase in the number and proportion of salaried

Manusmriti (or Laws of Manu), a first or second CE text. It spoke of four varnas, hierarchically ranked social orders (see footnote 3 of this chapter). Outside and below the varna order were those whom modern India designated untouchables in a caste system based on several thousand endogamous *jati*s (local endogamous subcastes) hierarchically ranked on conceptions of purity and pollution. The class languages that migrated to India with the British Raj's colonial modernity jostled against an evolving caste language of social difference.

The vocabulary of social difference in Mughal India more closely approximated that of the era of the gentleman in England than it did the vocabulary of rank, order and degree in medieval and renaissance Europe or of the varna status orders in India. This was in part because under the Mughal empire's *mansabdari* system, which conferred offices and income from landed estates to support incumbents, rank was not inheritable (Spear 1965). Status was not by inheritance but by performance. The Emperor could at any time transfer office and income to another person. The Mughals created what Norbert Elias (1983) would have called a 'court culture'. Commanders, administrators and courtiers shared an outlook and way of life. Like English gentlemen, they knew themselves and their kind from the manners, language and cultivation they shared. Mughal gentlemanliness persisted in Awadhi/Lucknawi language, manners and lifestyle (Oldenburg 1989).

British rule brought several vocabularies and narratives: liberal, Marxian and what one might call ethnographic. The ethnographic stream introduced the language of tribe and race, and the presumption that social attributes had a biological root. Colonel James Tod, whose *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan* constructed the

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employees . . . a change of enormous economic and social significance [because it tended to obliterate the "wage workers"]. At the same time, the distinction between salaried employees in non-manual occupations and wage workers in manual ones continued to be socially and pol-itically significant throughout the first half of the 20th century. In the popular perception it was only the latter that constituted the working class, whereas the former belonged to the middle class' (Béteille 2007: 289). As far as Béteille is concerned, it is the salaried middle class — managerial, professional, technical — that comes to occupy centre stage with no one below or above it structurally. We are left with the very rich and the very poor, persons outside class categorization (Béteille 2007: 289).

19th-century British view of Rajasthan (Crooke 1920), spoke of three great Rajput 'races' — the Solar, the Lunar and the Fire races (Babb 2007:116).

The language of class that accompanied British rule flowed from two sources, the liberal and the Marxian. The liberal language of class can be traced back to Macaulay's 1835 Minute on Education the goal of which was to form 'a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect' (Mansingh 2003: 236). Anil Seal's *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism* (1968) showed that by the late 19th century, the fruits of Macaulay's policy of educating Indians in English language and civilization were not only civil servants who served the Raj, but also nationalists who challenged it.

Before Gandhi assumed the leadership of the Indian National Congress in 1920, nationalists and the English-speaking middle class were synonymous. Jawaharlal Nehru in *The Discovery of India* spoke of the 'helplessness of the middle classes' before Gandhi's arrival on the scene:

> We seemed to be helpless in the grip of some all-powerful monster . . . The middle classes . . . were . . . submerged in this all pervading gloom . . . What could we do? How could we pull India from out of this quagmire of poverty and defeatism which had sucked her in? . . . And then came Gandhi. He was like a . . . a beam of light that pierced the darkness . . . like a whirlwind that upset many things but most of all the working of people's minds. (Nehru 1946: 360)

And so the English-speaking middle class took courage from Gandhi and followed his lead. By his encouragement of the use of Indian languages in the nationalist movement, he snapped the equation of nationalism with English speakers. Gandhi spoke to and for rural India. Like the bulk of the English-speaking middle classes, Nehru too followed Gandhi, but he tried to speak for the modern and Marxist (the two were conflated in the discourse of the time) social categories, not only the 'middle classes' but also what he called 'the peasantry', the 'workers', the 'petty *bourgeoisie*' (Nehru's italics) and, usually in disappointment, 'the intelligentsia'.

Nehru had acquired these categories during the 19 months he spent in Europe in 1926 and 1927. He spent some time in Brussels attending the Congress of Oppressed Nationalities as well as some in the Soviet Union, just 10 years away from its Bolshevik Revolution. 'The Brussels Congress', Nehru tells us in his *Autobiography*, 'as well as the subsequent Committee meetings of the League Against Imperialism . . . helped me to understand some of the problems of colonial and dependent countries' (Nehru 1961: 125). The vocabulary acquired in these years, of class and class conflict, continued to structure Nehru's understanding of social and political motivation and that of the Congress socialists. But it did not become the language of the Congress party.

The Congress annual session in Madras in December 1927, which was dominated by Nehru, was probably the high point of Marxian class language in the Congress's discourse. Mobilization against the Simon Commission (1927–30) and Gandhi's Salt Satyagraha (April 1930) returned the Congress discourse to a middle-class language of centrist nationalism, a language that prevailed up to Independence and beyond. When Pawan K. Varma, a civil servant turned author, published his best-selling *The Great Indian Middle Class*, he found it possible to say that 'in spite of the politics of Gandhi and the intentions of Nehru, the middle class . . . remained at the helm of the freedom movement' (Varma 1998: 42).

The first to notice a new middle class was Suman Dubey who credited Rajiv Gandhi with the ebullient growth of the 1980s and beyond: 'the 1990s will be a decade of radical and rapid transformation: the decade of the middle class, marching confidently into the twenty-first century' (Dubey 1992: 164). In the aftermath of economic liberalization in 1991, the language of class in India has added 'new' and 'old' to the category of middle class. Pawan Varma depicts the old middle class, what might be seen as the Nehru-generation middle class, as regarding it in bad taste to flaunt one's assets (Varma 1998: 40). Gandhi encouraged simple living in the name of *swaraj* — self mastery that prevented the individual from being a slave of desire, not least the desire to consume. Nehru encouraged simple living too, but for different reasons. The socialist society he tried to create aimed at distributive justice; becoming rich was thought to take place at the expense of the poor, just as the profit motive was thought of as anti-social.[9] What mattered for Gandhi was service. What mattered for Nehru was redistribution.

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[9] It is said that a proposal to ban the profit motive failed in the Constituent Assembly. At that time the dominant ideology about capitalism in the Nehruvian Congress was that 'the profit motive and private gain are inherently antisocial' (Rudolph and Rudolph 1987: 2, 27).

Post-1991 economic liberalization and post-globalization India has produced the language of 'India's New Middle Class', the title of Leela Fernandes's book (Fernandes 2006). According to a still-cited 2002 National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) study, the new middle class includes the 'Very Rich' (six million); the 'Consuming Class' (150 million); the 'Climbers' (275 million) and the 'Aspirants' (275 million). If we count the top two categories, we are talking about 15 per cent of the population at the time it was about one billion (Rao 2004). As investors are fond of saying, 156 million (now approaching 200 million) approximates something like the European Union (EU) market. At the other end, the poor are variously estimated at 25 to 30 per cent (or 250 to 300 million) of a one billion population. According to Fernandes:

> The growing visibility of this new Indian middle class embodied the emergence of a wider national political culture, one that has shifted from older ideologies of a state managed economy to a middle-class-based culture of consumption . . . Mainstream political discourses increasingly portray urban middle-class consumers as the representative citizens of liberalizing India. (Fernandes 2006: xv)

When consumption displaces service and achievement as the key marker of middle-class culture, money becomes the measure of who and what you are. This view is evident in the conversation that follows:

Elegant Rajput lady:	And what are you writing about?
Professor:	About Rajputs, about how they have changed from a landed class to middle class.
Lady:	Oh yes! My husband says we're middle-class now. It's all about money!
Husband:	True. We're all judged now by money.
Lady:	Are we really? My father was a maharaja. That is still very much part of me.
Husband:	Well, the fact that my *thikana* [estate] was important in Jaipur history does make a difference. And think about it. If someone wants to praise a businessman, an Ambani, a Tata, a Birla, what do they call him? A maharaja.[10]

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[10] Conversation at a dinner party in Jaipur, 9 February 2007.

Rajputs and the language of class

How does the language of class fit the discourses on social difference used in India? The vocabulary and narrative of the 'Rajputs' appear, in the first instance, to be more about status than about class. The term was used in the context of a naming pattern that identified Rajputs as Kshatriyas within the classical varna order. Dirk Kolff (1990) challenged this view by pointing out that 'Rajput' had a different meaning in 16th- and 17th-century north Indian regions such as Bundelkhand. Kolff argues that Rajput in this context designated 'fighting men' recruited from a village-based 'military labour market' that was tied to the agricultural seasons. The 'Rajput Great Tradition' arose, he argues, in post-Mughal Rajasthan when the term became endowed with ancient royal genealogies and got inflected by a Mughal-like hierarchical court culture. The bardic image which Tod (1920) adopted in his influential *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan* (first published in 1829 and 1830) treated Rajputs as Kshatriyas and helped to establish the 'Rajput Great Tradition'.

Today's Rajputs are aware of the transformation that the Mughal relationship wrought. In a recent semi-official history of Jodhpur, Dhananajaya Singh writes:

> There never was and will never be another age quite like the Mughal. Everything about it was . . . larger than life . . . From the majesty of the Emperor to the pomp of the Imperial Court, from the splendour of its architecture to sublimity of its art and music . . . From the stability and prosperity it engendered to the anarchy it left behind: in the history of the world the Mughal Empire is rivalled only by the Roman . . . The Rathores [of Jodhpur] were sucked into this whirlpool of Timurid greatness. They would surface two centuries later a different people, mighty warriors still, but effete and decadent. (Dhananajaya Singh 1994: 73)

Post the Mutiny and the Rebellion, British observers constructed a romantic image of the feudal Rajput. After 1858, as Queen Victoria's 'loyal feudatories', they became a pillar of the Raj. Under Tod's influence they made much of the fact that the antiquity of Rajput royal lineages surpassed that of European royalty. And they spoke of warrior aristocrats who cherished valour and honour and avoided utilitarian and intellectual pursuits. To die in battle fighting gallantly for a noble cause was the highest form of glory for them. 'The Rajput disdains the plough', says a proverb. 'A Rajput who reads will never ride a horse', says another (Lawrence 1928). But the Rajput romance played not only for the colonial power: drawing on Tod's *Annal's and Antiquities* (1920), early nationalists in Bengal put Rajputs at the centre of their narrative in plays, songs, poems, and histories that celebrated Mewar's Rana Pratap as a freedom fighter who resisted imperial rule.

The ideology of the pre-Independence Rajputs denied class differences. Rich and poor Rajputs, it was said, shared the same identity and status. Myth and history united Rajputs as a community of warrior-rulers: the brotherhood of their corporate lineage overrode the differences in the material conditions. Legends spoke of princes carrying off village maidens to be their brides. The least member of a Rajput clan, whether Kachchawa, Rathore or Sisodia, was also a brother.

In the 1930s, the Congress-affiliated States Peoples Freedom Movement introduced the language of class along with that of nation into the princely states of Rajasthan (Rudolph and Rudolph 1984b). Jagirdars were said to be a feudal class, with 'feudal' now being construed negatively in the light of liberal and Marxist ideology rather than positively, as Tod would have it. In the 1950s, after Independence and after princely state integration, and with the dismantling of the old regime and the introduction of land reform, Rajputs became sharply divided by material interests. The earlier ideology of Rajput equality and solidarity died; class differences that challenged status and clan equality led to cleavages and conflict.

The class politics of land reform

The language of class introduced by the States Peoples Freedom Movement in the 1930s and 1940s structured the process of abolition of jagirs in the 1950s. Within two years, between 1947 and 1949, India's old regime — its kings and landed aristocrats — was swept away in a largely peaceful republican and democratic revolution. India's princes, who had ruled a quarter of India's people and two-fifths of its territory, surrendered their political power.[11] The abolition of jagirs in Rajasthan disestablished feudal land relations, leaving thousands of landholders and their dependents in radically reduced economic circumstances. The result of princely state integration and the abolition of jagirs was a revolution by persuasion, if not consent (Menon 1956). Rajasthan's 22 princely states, 20 of which were ruled by Rajputs, were first 'integrated' into India, then merged to form a state in the Indian union.[12] Rajput jagirdars, who controlled over 60 per cent of the state's productive land, were dispossessed.[13]

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[11] Rajasthan's rulers were allowed to keep their titles and considerable 'personal' property, and were granted generous privy purses. The purses were abolished in 1971 by Indira Gandhi's Congress government.

In 1950–51, the Congress government of Rajasthan, like Congress governments in the other Indian states, prepared legislation designed to eliminate the 'intermediaries' between the tiller of the soil and his government. In Rajasthan this meant legislation which would 'resume' jagir land. Together with the end of princely rule, the resumption of jagirs completed the dismantling of Rajasthan's 'old regime', i. e., the political and economic institutions of monarchy and feudalism. The government compensated the jagirdars with government bonds of a certain value. The criteria used to determine the 'amount' of the compensation became an issue for the courts for almost a decade (Rudolph and Rudolph 1987: 107–10).

The fact that Rajput society included few big landholders and many more small ones complicated the process of compensation. Unlike the big jagirdars, who usually held some land in *khudkasht* (under personal cultivation) in addition to the lands cultivated by tenants, Rajputs with small holdings usually owned no khudkasht, only land cultivated by tenants. Many derived their main incomes from service in Rajput courts and jagirs. For them land reform in the form of jagir resumption meant that their land was transferred to the tenants to whom they had leased it. Many of those tenants were Jats (a north Indian caste reputed as good cultivators), who became very influential in the early politics of Rajasthan, often in competition with Rajputs. Rajputs with small landholdings were left without khudkasht, without the prospect of even nominal compensation and without employment in the princely state service sector. To the small Rajput, land reform appeared to be a zero-sum game. Pleading economic survival, many of them ousted their tenants illegally, and sometimes forcefully.

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[12] Before the first national election in 1952, Rajasthan was governed by a 'popular' ministry appointed in effect by the Home and States Minister Sardar Patel, and was more responsible to him than to the recently formed Rajasthan Pradesh Congress Committee.

[13] Sixty-six per cent of Rajasthan's land was in jagir and 34 per cent in *khalsa* or crown lands. Forty-eight per cent of the villages lay in khalsa and 52 per cent in jagir (Dool Singh 1964: 44).

The human drama of the abolition of jagirs was dramatically captured by a visiting British scholar who found himself in a position to observe its effects in a large thikana:

> Deoli was dominated socially, no less than physically, by the fortress that towers over it. Until 1948 it had contained a court of law, police station and a jail, revenue offices — all the business of a thikana encompassing sixty smaller villages. The ruler was always attended by a number of his subordinate Rajput jagirdars . . . and by a retinue of two hundred servants . . . The courtyards and stairs were alive with people in those days, officials and tenants, litigants, petitioners waiting for an audience with the ruler . . . This way of life continued unchanged until 1948, and then without warning, the mainstay of village life was removed. The Congress Government pressed home its democratic reforms, abruptly relieving the ruler of his former administrative powers . . . In order to emphasize the change, the new magistrates' court, revenue office and civil administration were centred in different towns and villages, each more than twelve miles away. In 1951 the palace was an empty shell. The elephants and most of the horses were gone; nine-tenths of the retainers had been turned away, and the stairs and courtyards were deserted. (Carstairs 1957: 22–25)

The Rajputs, however, did not surrender without a fight. They challenged the legislation on the question of compensation in courts. The judiciary, more interested in property rights than the legislatures, for a time stayed implementation in the name of 'meaningful compensation'. Rajputs with big thikanas went to court in an effort to gain higher compensation. They formed an association, the Kshatriya Mahasabha, to coordinate their legal and political resistance and to negotiate better terms (Rudolph and Rudolph 1984a).

The leadership of the Congress government that initiated and implemented the abolition of the jagirdari system was drawn from activists of variously named Congress surrogates that operated in the princely states in the 1930s and 1940s — the Praja Mandals, the States Peoples Conference, the States Peoples Freedom Movement. They had pressed for a constitutional and representative government and for civil and political rights. Praja Mandalists were drawn from a narrow stratum of educated middle-class professionals. Though Rajput rulers sometimes repressed and sometimes suppressed their activity, for the most part, they tolerated it (Rubin 1983).

After an uncertain and precarious start, the Congress party in Rajasthan found a leader in Chief Minister Mohan Lal Sukhadia, a consummate politician and administrator. Sukhadia, who hailed from Mewar (Udaipur), managed to serve for 17 years as Chief Minister, a record yet to be broken. He was supported by another Mewari (term for one hailing from the Mewar region), Rajasthan's longest-serving Chief Secretary, Balwant Singh Mehta. For over a decade they negotiated the terms and conditions of land reform, working for an effective and peaceful settlement in the form of compensated jagir resumption. In January 1954, soon after the conclusion of a settlement with the big jagirdars, 18 of them crossed the aisle to join the Congress legislature party, an act that greatly strengthened Sukhadia's and the Congress's hold on power. The Vice President of the Kshatriya Mahasabha and its chief negotiator, Rawal Sahib Madan Singh Nawalgarh, expressed the sentiments of the Rajput establishment when he said:

> In the present circumstances the most sensible course open to the landholders . . . was to strengthen the hands of the Nehru government by actively supporting Congress, which is the only political organization capable of ensuring unity and solidarity of the nation. The representatives of the landholders who met recently at Jaipur . . . were convinced that sectarian and communal considerations should be eschewed.[14]

Eventually, in a state assembly of 200 seats, 25 MLAs (Members of the Legislative Assembly) joined the Congress, as did one MP (Member of Parliament) and 'hundreds' of rank and file Rajputs. The big jagirdars had led the way towards class transformation by adopting the middle-class outlook and the vocabulary of the Nehruvian Congress (Rudolph and Rudolph 1984a: 38–78).

The small Rajputs and the chhote bhaiyen were another matter. They lost their service jobs in thikanas as well as princely government service, and many lost control of some or all of their small landholdings.[15] Initially, the small Rajputs' jagirs of ₹ 5,000 and below were exempted from resumption, but, under pressure mainly from Jat tenant cultivators, the Congress leadership in New Delhi succumbed and the exemption was withdrawn. Subsequently, tenant cultivators, many of whom were Jats, took possession of the land they cultivated. The small Rajputs came to believe that they had been betrayed not only by the Congress government in Delhi but also by their fellow Rajputs. Joined by chhote bhaiyen, they broke with the Kshatriya Mahasabha to form the Bhuswami Sangh.

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[14] *Hindustan Times*, 4 February 1954.

The name of the organization was indicative of the social protest and religious revivalism of its ideological orientation. *Bhumiya* refers to those attached to the soil, but it also has a more specific reference to the *bhom*, a feudal tenure whose leading characteristic was its inalienability. Granted for service to the state, bhom tenures did not ordinarily carry an obligation to provide future service to the state. *Swami* evokes a sense of the master — a master, in the first instance, of the self but, in this context, also one of the soil. The Bhuswami Sangh's goal was to save the small Rajputs from economic and social ruin; it tried for three years, with little success, to use agitations, sometimes violent ones, to negotiate better terms. In the mid-1950s, Rajasthan experienced a mini class and civil war as the Bhuswami Sangh, under the leadership of Madan Singh Danta, turned violent, causing the deaths of many Bhuswamis and policemen (Rudolph and Rudolph 1984b).

When the big Rajputs settled with the Congress and the smaller ones lost their status as landlords and their jobs in court service, the notion of the Rajputs as rulers and as the dominant stratum in a status order disappeared from view. In all this, the Rajputs had not only experienced class cleavage and conflict but also faced the prospect of fashioning a new identity in a republican and democratic state and, as soon became apparent, in a market economy.

Fashioning a hybrid identity: A Rajput middle class

Looking back from the perspective of 2008, it can be said that the Rajputs of Rajasthan have been fashioning new identities for almost 60 years, ever since they lost their lands, titles and governing authority. For analytic purposes, we want to discuss their changing identity in the context of three generations — the 'original' landholders (both large and small) when land reform began, their sons and then their grandsons. The three generations were confronted with different possibilities as the economy, politics and society around them changed. What they could choose and become depended not only on the changing context but also on their social origins as large jagirdars, chhote bhaiyen and small Rajputs.

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[15] For how the land-reform legislation was implemented in the countryside, see the two fine studies by Thomas Rosin (1978, 1981).

The chhote bhaiyen were in some ways best prepared for the new era. When land reform began, these 'younger brothers' were doubly armed: with modest expectations and the capacity to live by their wits and talents. In most large-jagir households, the eldest son inherited the title and the estate.[16] Younger sons were provided for by settling some land and property on them, but which was usually not enough for them to live comfortably or independently. Some younger sons lived on the sufferance of their eldest brother, the *thakur*, and became a part of his staff or retinue. But often they would go into the service of a princely state or a large thikana. For example, Colonel Kesri Singh, a younger brother of Amar Singh, the diarist and thakur of Kanota in Jaipur state, graduated from Mayo College, attended the Agriculture College at Poona, where he graduated with distinction, and went on to serve in the princely states of Kashmir and Gwalior before becoming Deputy Inspector of Police in Jaipur state, the head of its *Shikarkhana* (hunting department) and the author of several important books on hunting.[17]

The army of a princely state or, in the 1930s after Indians could hold King's commissions, the Indian Army also became suitable choices for these younger Rajput brothers. For example, General Nathu Singh of Gumanpura (a Banswara thikana), a Sandhurst graduate, was the second-ranking Indian general behind K. M. Cariappa, the first Chief of Staff of the post-Independence Indian Army. In the post-Independence second generation, we also have Jaswant Singh, successively India's Defence Minister, External Affairs Minister and Finance Minister in the 1998–2004 NDA (National Democratic Alliance) governments of Atal Behari Vajpayee, the grandson of Zorawar Singh, the Rawal of Jasol (Barmer district, Jodhpur), and son of a younger son of that house. His father's military career was spent in the Jodhpur Lancers, including service abroad in World War II. After graduating from Mayo College, Jaswant Singh too chose a military career, serving as an officer in the Indian Army for nine years (1957–66) before joining politics (Jaswant Singh 2006: 3–51).

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[16] Rajput inheritance usually followed the rule of primogeniture.

[17] See, for instance, Kesri Singh (1959, 1964, 1970).

The small Rajputs were the least prepared. Many of them were the victims of inheritance rules which, in some contexts, allowed the division of the land among brothers, rules that led the to progressive fragmentation of agricultural lands.[18] When the negotiations were over, a few regained their lands and became small farmers, often living up to the stereotype that Rajputs could not farm (Rosin 1987). Some sought careers in public service, the most notable example being that of Bhairon Singh Shekhawat, three times Chief Minister of Rajasthan (1977–80; 1990–92; 1993–98), Vice President of India (2002–07) and an unsuccessful Presidential candidate (2007).[19]

More often, ideas of honour, nurtured in villages in the interior, made it difficult for the small Rajputs to take up menial jobs in urban commercial settings. For example, they often rejected service work in the emergent Rajput-dominated heritage hotel industry. Being a waiter, for instance, involved having to clear the *jhootha* (the polluting leftovers) of the guests. This practice was thought to be demeaning. In the early days of the heritage hotels, before the rise of professional hotel management schools, Rajput proprietors turned to Nepalis, for whom hotel jobs were a step up from village poverty, and who were not bound by Hindu conventions of pollution.

The distinctions between jagirdars (or big Rajputs), chhote bhaiyen and *bhumiya*s (small Rajputs) make it clear that Rajputs entered the process of adaptation after land reform from different social locations. In the first and second generations after land reform, Rajput adaptation often took the form of moving from a landed class base into the old middle class of educated professionals in service-related careers.

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[18] These rules prevailed in only a few places in Rajasthan, such as the Udaipurwati region of Shekawati.

[19] After graduating from high school, Bhairon Singh Shekhawat first worked as a farmer, and was subsequently able to join the police as a sub-inspector. At the age of 29 he was elected on a Jan Sangh ticket as an MLA in the Rajasthan legislative assembly. Beginning in 1952, he served there for 22 years. He was one of the several MLAs we interviewed in 1956 during our first year of research in India.

Our research on why and how Rajputs entered the new middle classes focused mainly on the big Rajputs and the chhote bhaiyen. What possibilities did they face, 10 years out of 'feudal' Rajasthan, 30 years out, 60 years out? The clearest case for Rajputs becoming a part of the new middle classes can be made for those 60 years out and in the third generation, those who were 25 to 35 years old in 2008. This result has been determined, to a considerable extent, by the changing nature of the Indian economy and its labour market.[20]

The first generation affected by land reform spent the 1950s and 1960s dealing with its massive disruption of their lives: loss of status, income, wealth, and responsibilities. Their compensation was in the form of government bonds whose interest income was meagre and whose sale value was radically discounted. Either way, they found themselves in greatly reduced circumstances and with very few properties or responsibilities. Few were prepared by temperament or training to cope with a market economy, much less an unstable and rapidly changing one. Stories abound about how jagirdars were taken advantage of or squandered their money. Many retained as personal property valuable urban holdings — palaces, *haveli*s (mansions), *bagh*s (garden-palaces), and forts — but, in a catch-22 situation, had to dispose of them under fire sale conditions to comply with urban land ceilings (Bhargava 1983).

For the next generation, there were two tracks: eldest sons could try to make a go of being gentlemen farmers on what was left of the estate or they could try to find an off-estate career suitable for a Rajput. Not many of the second generation could expect, in the 1970s and 1980s, to be maintained by, or make a go of, their fathers' estates. Estates were now commercial, not 'feudal'. They were staffed by 'employees' rather than by 'servants'. To the extent that they produced for the market, they had to deal with 'the bottom line'. They required hands-on management of a style that the pre-Independence Rajput thakurs could hardly recognize: knowledge about scientific agriculture, including high-yielding varieties and what helped them grow; attention to input costs and remunerative prices; and transportation to the market. In our panel of Rajput lineages, there were three such gentleman farmers. They had trouble (but succeeded in) finding brides willing to give up city living for life on the farm. One of them had a supplementary career as a college teacher.

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[20] Our generalizations about change over three generations are based in part on observation and social interaction, beginning in 1956, with a number of Rajput lineages, particularly those from Kanota, Bissau, Bedla, Jobner, Chomu, Acherol, Alsisar, Mandawa, Nawalgarh, Naila, Santa, and Khandela.

For those who chose to leave the thikana, there were some obvious choices. As we have seen, military service was one. It was compatible with the Rajput self-conception as warriors. In the early decades after Independence, a career in the military services retained some of the prestige bequeathed by empire and class. Also favoured was employment in the tea gardens, where life on horseback (later the jeep) and at the club captured the manly and leisure-class style favoured by Rajputs. Darjeeling in the northeast, where the pay and social life were better, was favoured over the Nilgiris in the south. A few went into business — an automobile, petrol pump or LPG cylinder dealership; an electric power company; or banking. Rajputs tended to choose occupational niches that were clearly distinguishable from those occupied by the traditional trading castes. They did not go into the retail business where they would have to serve and cater to customers. (However, as we shall see, being a host at a palace was an entirely different matter.) It should be noted that these were careers not dependent on testing. While one could find a Rajput or two in the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) or the Indian Police Service (IPS), on the whole, they did not take to the non-military meritocratic public services. 'We don't enter careers that require exams', one of our second-generation informants noted wryly.

Another option surfaced without signalling the great importance it would have in the future — the travel industry. Rajasthan was beginning to attract tourists. Young men without estates, or urban property to fall back on, started joining travel bureaus or opening one. At the same time government academies for hotel management began to come up. Initially they prepared their students for jobs in public-sector hotels. In Rajasthan, the Rajasthan Tourism Development Corporation (RTDC) took over princely state guest houses and began to build and operate them as two-, three- and four-star RTDC hotels. Some Rajputs entered government service as managers in RTDC-operated facilities throughout the state. More important, some of the exprinces and jadirdars began to notice that their large unused and deteriorating havelis, palaces and forts might make good sites for hotels.

By the time the third generation came along, those who were in their late twenties or thirties in 2008, the career preferences of the Rajputs had changed once more. The labour market had changed and with it the perceptions and attitudes of third-generation Rajputs. We were told that the army had become less attractive because it had, over time, become more democratic. Officers, more often than not, now came from moffusil towns rather than cosmopolitan cities, were from lower rather than higher castes, and hailing from families where the fathers had been Junior Commissioned Officers (JCOs) rather than commissioned officers. Salaries were less attractive as the pay of all public services, military and civilian, increasingly lagged behind what could be earned in increasingly prosperous private firms. The tea gardens lost their charm as relative compensation declined and ethnic and separatist violence in the northeast became more common.

But these losses were balanced by certain kinds of business-related careers. We observed that many second-generation Rajputs entered careers in banks and, to a lesser extent, in management in firms. They preferred, it seems, to be in service rather than to be on their own in business as proprietors or entrepreneurs.

There was a little movement among Rajput women in the second generation. The Rajput seclusion of women had been very stringent, particularly in rural areas. The enabling conditions for a woman to take up work outside the household included an urban environment and a sympathetic and supportive husband willing to override an unsympathetic mother-in-law if need be. In Jaipur, two entrepreneurial women, wives of younger brothers, opened primary and secondary schools, which were in great demand in the under-served Jaipur market of the 1960s. The career of the late Kunwari Sahiba of Mandawa suggests the exceptional conditions that made it possible for her to become one of the earliest entrepreneurs to connect traditional Rajasthani block-printing on fabric (a craft on the verge of extinction) to the modern middle-class market. Daughter of a progressive Ajmer thikana called Masuda, she began to search out traditional wooden blocks used in the printing of cloth, and began to print, design and market garments from her Jaipur haveli. Her liberation from the seclusion of the *zenana* (women's quarters) and movement into the public world of manufacturing and marketing was aided and abetted by her husband, the late Thakur Devi Singh Mandawa.[21]

The transformation of Mayo College and Rajput identity

The history of Mayo College provides another entry point into the transformation of Rajput society from landed class to middle class. Named after Viceroy Lord Mayo, who founded it in 1870, Mayo was one of several educational institutions known as 'chiefs' colleges' that the British Raj had established to educate the sons of princes and nobles.[22] The schools were created in the aftermath of the momentous Mutiny and Rebellion of 1857, when Crown rule replaced the East India Company's rule. The Crown and its representative in India, the Viceroy, were in search of support and legitimacy. In Queen Victoria's phrase, India's princes were asked to become 'loyal feudatories' of the Crown (Rudolph and Rudolph 1984a). Schools for princes and nobles were seen as a way for assimilating them to an imperial governing class. The schools were created in the shadow of England's great public schools such as Eton, Harrow and Winchester (Sherring 1897). Tory imperialist viceroys such as Lords Curzon and Lytton counted on the 'natural aristocracy' to cement British rule in India. As they saw it, India's princes and nobles were the 'real Indians', respected, honoured and obeyed, while the emergent English-educated middle classes, who claimed they spoke for the Indian nation, were deracinated and seen as inauthentic (see Kipling 1937).

Soon after Mayo's founding, the then Viceroy, Lord Lytton, expressed at the school's prize-giving in 1879 contemporary expectations about what it could accomplish:

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[21] The credit for nurturing the hand-block garment industry goes to a number of people. Among the pioneers were Jaipur-based Faith and John Singh who, in the early 1970s, launched the Anokhi line of hand block-printed garments, a line that has become highly successful worldwide.

[22] The others were at Rajkot, Indore and Murree, the last now in Pakistan.

> There are I think many points of resemblance between the great Rajput clans and the English houses founded by our northern ancestors. Both of them owe to the same characteristics the positions they have made, and still maintain for themselves in the political hierarchy of an ancient race. Those characteristics are energy, fearlessness, the love of healthful exercise, an instinctive aptitude for active life, an instinctive scorn for all unmanly ease. No race, no class can long maintain its social and moral ascendancy if it degenerates in physical vigour. And it is perhaps a special merit of our English system of education that it aims at training, developing and strengthening not only the mind but also the body. The idea was well expressed long ago by Colonel Walter in an excellent and most suggestive report which may have influenced Lord Mayo when he founded the present college. In that very sensible report Colonel Walter pointed out that what was then most needed for the education of India's young rulers and nobles was an Indian Eton. Ajmer is India's Eton and you are India's Eton boys.[23]

Until World War II, the arrangements at Mayo reflected the hierarchy and deference of Rajasthan's princely society. The major states (Jaipur, Jodhpur, Bikaner) built 'houses' for maharajas' sons, the heirs apparent, and the state's noblemen. The royals and thakurs arrived with retinues, a bevy of servants, cooks, *syces* (grooms), etc. Given its limited clientele, there were few students in the early years: 98 in 1931, 170 in 1939. The end of the old regime at Mayo and the beginning of its transition to a middle-class school took place during the 'McCanlis years', 1943–48. Those years coincided with the end of World War II, Independence and decolonization, the integration of the princely states, the abolition of the jagirdari system, and the formation of the state of Rajasthan. M. A. McCanlis did for the school approximately what the Government of India and the Government of Rajasthan were doing for princely and feudal Rajasthan — ending the old regime by peaceful means. The retinues of servants were done away with. Personal cooks and private dining were replaced by a public mess in which all students, regardless of caste or religion, dined. McCanlis replaced the syllabus supplied by the Viceroy with Senior Cambridge exams, which meant that they were graded at Cambridge University. (The school eventually moved to the Central Board of Secondary Education or CBSE standard for Indian secondary education.) To ease the impact, the changes occurred over several years. The residential houses were converted to the new system, the teaching and administrative staff was Indianized, and admission procedures were rationalized even as applications plummeted. In 1947, Mayo had its first Indian Principal, T. N. Vyas, and became a member of the Indian Public Schools Society.

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[23] See the Mayo website, www.mayocollege.com/aboutEtonIndia.asp (accessed 6 March 2008). The following citations are also from this website.

With the end of princely states and the departure of the British from India, the school's *raison d'etre* seemed to have disappeared. The very definition of the school as a simulacrum of princely state society evaporated. 'The exit of the British shook the very foundations of the school and created much uncertainty among its fraternity and community'.[24] Into the breach stepped the soon-to-become legendary figure of J. T. M. (Jack) Gibson. In the 15 years between 1954 and 1969, he was able to transform Mayo into a premier Indian public school with a reputation for quality education, sports and discipline. Gibson's background as a Doon School teacher helped him re-shape Mayo College into a rival public school. Gibson's charisma arose from his multifaceted character — he was a naturalist, trekker and mountaineer, as well a teacher and administrator — and from his entrepreneurial talents — he travelled throughout India, to Delhi, Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras, to bring the message of Mayo to India's middle classes (Gibson 1976).[25] He told the parents of potential students 'to send their sons to Mayo which . . . had shed its princely aura and was now a well-endowed public school open to all'.[26] Finally, in the face of considerable opposition from the princely members on the Governing Board, Gibson reconciled the old and the new regimes by arranging for the Congress party to hold its annual All India Congress Committee (AICC) session within the precincts of Mayo in 1954,[27] a reconciliation that was continued at the Mayo centenary in 1976 when Congress Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was invited to be the chief guest, and on which occasion she praised the school's ability to adapt to changing times.[28]

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[24] This has been taken from the Mayo College website, Mayocollege.com, the section on 'The Gibson Years' (accessed 8 April 2008).

[25] Gibson's *As I Saw It* (1976) is 'made up of extracts from letters' written between 23 January 1937, when he joined the Doon School as a teacher, and 11 January 1968, the last year of his principalship.

[26] Mayocollege.com, the section on 'The Gibson Years' (accessed 8 April 2008).

[27] The AICC session was held 'against the wishes of the . . . reluctant Governing Body, whose princely members had an innate suspicion of Congress politicians'. Maycollege.com, the section entitled 'The Gibson Years' (accessed 8 April 2008).

In 1996 Mayo broke even further from its princely past as a Chief's school when it appointed Pramod Sharma as Principal. Sharma was an alumnus of an Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) with 19 years of experience as a top-level executive in Information Technology (IT) firms that provided global services. He had begun his career as a teacher at the Doon School. A new global and middle-class Mayo was apparent in an interview Sharma gave to a newspaper. 'The world over', Sharma said,

> parents are getting more competitive for their children . . . The middle class has realized that upward mobility is possible through good education. Twenty years ago, today's range of career paths was not available — the choice was either engineering, medicine, or the civil service. Also the choice would have been limited to India, whereas now the opportunities are phenomenal. Graduates are more prepared to play a role in a liberalised global market.[29]

Items in the 'News and Views' in the Old Boys Annual Reports for 2004 and 2005 confirm the image of Mayo College graduates in middle-class business and professional careers in India and abroad. Positions reported by alumni include: Managing Director, Tata Motors; Managing Director, National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development; Justices of the High Court in Rajasthan, Punjab and Haryana; LTX Corporation, California; Additional Director, Central Bureau of Investigation; Director General, Narcotics Control Bureau; Dubai Modern High School; Perot Systems (a computer firm); Commander-in-Chief, Andaman and Nicobar Islands; two Members of Parliament (elected in 2004); Minister for External Affairs, Government of India.

Equally revealing were the plans of the 37 students who graduated in the 'Batch of 2006–07'. Three were headed for St Stephen's College, University of Delhi; eight were entering other Indian colleges (four in Delhi, two in Christ Church College, Bangalore, and two at St Xavier's College, Kolkata); four were joining colleges overseas — one to Cornell in the USA, two to colleges in the UK, and one to a college in Singapore; two were taking up medicine in MBBS programmes; four were doing business management Bachelor's degrees; six were joining engineering or computer science degree programmes, including two in IITs at Mumbai and Kharagpur. One planned to study architecture. The largest group, eight in all, planned to enrol in three-year hotel management programmes.

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[28] Mayocollege.com, the sections entitled 'The Gibson Years' and 'The Das Ganju Gupta Years' (accessed 8 April 2008).

[29] Bo Johnson, 'Organisational Turnaround', *Financial Times,* 9 June 2005, p. 11.

These careers and degree programmes indicate that Mayo's mission has morphed from educating royals to become achieving aristocrats and loyal allies of the crown to one of educating the sons of the middle classes to become successful professionals and businessmen. We estimate that Rajput boys (perhaps 30 per cent of the 2006–07 graduating batch) learn to be middle-class, and middle-class boys acquire a Rajput inflection[30] from the school's origin as a chief's college for educating Rajput rulers and nobles. Like the story of Rajasthan's heritage hotels that follows, the account of Mayo College blends strands of royal provenance with middle-class culture to make a hybrid class identity.

Heritage hotels and hybrid identities

Like education at Mayo College, the tourist and hospitality industry, particularly the Rajput-operated heritage hotel segment, has been a principal site of Rajput adaptation. An early consequence of the end of the old regime in Rajasthan was that the maharajas' and noblemens' palaces, forts and havelis lay vacant and unattended. Urban land ceiling laws compounded the problem. Minimal rents could sometimes be collected for space in moffusil towns from the Government of Rajasthan for minor offices and primary schools or from cash-strapped NGOs. *Chaprasi*s (peons), clerks and teachers competed with bats and pigeons for the high-ceilinged space. More often, the forts and havelis were left to the depredations of *chowkidar*s (watchmen) whose families camped in their premises. In cities such as Jaipur, the royal family and big thakurs were forced by urban land ceiling regulations and laws to sell their 'excess' land for house plots[31] or relinquish it to state or city development agencies such as the Jaipur Development Authority.

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[30] We estimate that nine of the 12 members of the Mayo Executive Committee of the General Council are Rajputs, www.mayocollege.com (accessed 8 April 2008).

But there were escape hatches. One was agricultural uses such as orchards and nurseries. Another was commercial uses such as hotels. The Jaipur royal family was among the first to catch on. The family owned two great properties outside Jaipur's city walls: One was the Jai Mahal, which had been the residence of the kingdom's prime ministers, most notably of the penultimate prime minister, Sir Mirza Ismail. The other great property was the royal family's 'country' or 'garden' palace, the Ram Bagh. In 1955 the then Maharaja, Man Singh, turned the graceful Indo-Saracenic Jai Mahal into a hotel by leasing it to one of India's leading hotel chains, the Taj group. In 1958 he did the same for the even more graceful Indo-Saracenic Ram Bagh. Both properties have been repeatedly refurbished over the years. Today, their distinctive architecture and princely state ambience keep them in the forefront of Jaipur's more recently constructed five-star hotels.

The Maharana of Udaipur, Bhagwat Singh, was another early entrant into the hotel business. He converted the Jag Niwas, the summer palace of the maharanas of Udaipur, into the Lake Palace Hotel. Located in the centre of Lake Pichola with the Aravali hills framing the lake, it must be approached by launch. It is perhaps the best known and the most memorable of Rajasthan's princely state hotels.[32] Palace and haveli hotels soon caught on, with Bikaner House at Mount Abu, Bissau and Khetri House in Jaipur being early entrants.

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[31] Urban land ceiling laws made it illegal to hold extensive urban properties. The law affected both the size of the plots on which buildings stood and the land surrounding them, typically occupied by baghs, 'gardens' large enough to serve as hunting preserves. The land ceiling law forced owners, often Rajput jagirdars of major thikanas, to rent out or sell their garden properties or lease them for commercial purposes to nurseries, bus depots, transport companies, and parking facilities. Unniara Bagh, Kanota Bagh and others were divided into small house plots and sold to home builders. For an account of the ceilings legislation, see Kabra (1975) and Urban Land (Ceilings and Regulation) Act, 1976. This Act was passed simultaneously in many states, including Rajasthan.

[32] For a more detailed account of the royals leading the way into the hotel business, see Taft (2003: 128). The Lake Palace Hotel has entered

The British were said to have acquired an empire in India in a fit of absence of mind. Something similar can be said for the way in which great thikana *garh*s (fort palaces) morphed into what came to be heralded as heritage hotels. Many narratives float around Jaipur which claim to explain how it happened. One credits Rajvir Singh, a scion of the Dundlodh Shekhawati thikana, with initiating the process. In 1973, he took a group of American tourists on a tour by Ambassador car to key sites in Rajasthan. He arranged to put them up in rulers' palaces and guest houses. In 1977, he introduced a group of 90 French tourists to 'adventure tourism' by taking them on a camel safari in Shekhawati that travelled from the Dundlodh garh to the Mandawa garh, on to Fatehpur (a Shekhawati town with splendid painted havelis belonging to absentee Marwari busisnessmen), and then back to Jaipur. In 1978, Rajvir Singh introduced Dominique Lapierre, author of *Freedom at Midnight*, to Kunwar (he was not yet the Thakur) Devi Singh of Mandawa, who arranged for the first group of French tourists to stay at the Mandawa Fort (later renamed Castle Mandawa). In 1980, Castle Mandawa opened with six rooms.[33]

According to Frances Taft, at the end of the 1980s a major shift occurred when what she calls 'historic properties' came to be known

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history in a variety of ways, from being the site of the 1964 Pugwash conference that first called for a ban on anti-missile missiles, to the filming of the James Bond film *Octopussy*, and to visits by famous persons such as Jacqueline Kennedy. When Bhagwat Singh died in 1984, he created a trust that disinherited his eldest son, Mahendra, for challenging him in court, gave his second son, Arvind, the largest share in the trust and his daughter, Yogeshwari Kumari, a lesser share. Since then, Arvind Singh Mewar has successfully developed Mewar hotel properties and made Udaipur a destination city even while being engaged in legal battles with his two siblings (see Rohit Parihar, 'Mewar Muddle', *India Today*, 24 January 2000).

[33] This paragraph draws on Taft (2003: 128–29). Since we are among those she interviewed in the process of writing this article and since we know many of her other sources and have listened to their accounts, Taft's accounts more or less tally with ours. Here we elaborate upon one of her stories, the one about Mandawa. According to the late Kunwari Sahiba of Mandawa, one of the reasons the family got into the hotel business was her concern about finding suitable employment for her younger son, Pradhuman, whose three older brothers had established careers in the army, banking, etc.

as heritage hotels. 'The origins of this transition', she says, 'are not entirely clear' (Taft 2003: 130). 'Lloyd and Susanne Rudolph', she writes,

> recollect that when they returned to Rajasthan in 1983, they travelled via Florence, where they stayed in a villa converted into a hotel, and brought with them a brochure illustrating how the villa and similar properties (Italian villas, German *Schlosser*, French *chateaux*, English manor and country houses, etc.) were being marketed in a way that emphasized their historic architecture, décor and associations. (Ibid.)

The Rudolphs showed the brochure to Mohan Singh of Kanota and Devi Singh of Mandawa 'who were actively . . . running family properties as hotels' (ibid.).[34] Mohan Singh and Devi Singh saw that the heritage approach being used in Europe to market historical hotel properties to tourists 'offered marketing possibilities for their own hotels' (ibid.). Taft explains in some detail how the India Heritage Hotel Association (IHHA) was formed and became operational in September 1990 (ibid.: 131–32).[35] In 2007, the Association had 38 member hotels in Rajasthan, almost all of which had Rajput proprietors.[36]

Heritage hotels, however, will not exist, much less flourish, without the tourist industry,[37] which is, and is likely to remain, fast-growing. By 2012, it is estimated that the tourism sector of the global economy will generate 3.8 per cent of the global gross domestic product (GDP) and create 90.8 million jobs (PATA 2003: 150). It is India's third-largest source of foreign exchange (Sinclair 1998) and, in 2006, accounted for 5.9 per cent of India's GDP.[38] Tourism accounts for about 15 per cent of Rajasthan's economy, ranking third after industry (32.5 per cent) and agriculture (22.5 per cent).[39]

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[34] Early on, Mohan Singh, Devi Singh and others were advised by a fellow Rajput who had become a professional in the hospitality industry. This was Vikram Singh Chomu, a manager of hotels for the Taj group, including the Taj Mahal in Bombay and the Rambagh in Jaipur. He knew the nuts and bolts as well as the big picture. As he put it, Rajputs wishing to run hotels had to be instructed about what was required for a bathroom that met Western tourists' standards. Interview with Vikram Singh Chomu, 1 February 2007.

[35] The Department of Tourism, Government of India and of Government of Rajasthan played important roles. Becoming operational entailed a classification system, required standards and inspection procedures. In 2001 the IHHA set up a website (www.indianhertiagehotels.com) and most of the individual hotels have websites of their own.

[36] http://www.heritagehotelsofrajasthan.com (accessed 7 July 2009).

[37] Barbara N. Ramusack gives two versions of how the tourism industry has developed in Rajasthan (Ramusack 1994, 1995). For a more recent account of the tourist industry in Rajasthan, see Henderson and Weisgrau (2007).

Heritage hotels are located in Rajasthan's tourism and hospitality industry. The Rajputs who operate heritage hotels face a financial bottom line, a need to operate in the black rather than in the red. But these proprietors also have other motives, besides making money. Our colleague, the late Mohan Singh, Thakur of Kanota, was not alone in seeing the conversion of Narain Niwas, the haveli built in 1935 by his uncle, the diarist Amar Singh (S. Rudolph, L. Rudolph with Kanota 2001), into a hotel as a way of preserving his patrimony and his Rajput identity. Like many of those who joined him and Devi Singh Mandawa in the IHHA, he was as motivated by the desire to save a way of life as by making money.[40] Operating a hotel allowed these Rajputs to continue their role as patrons, especially as patrons of the traditional arts, employing carpenters and masons who recapitulated traditional pilasters and cornices; artists who refurbished and repainted plastered walls with delicate designs; woodcarvers who reproduced the long-legged lounge chair of the British topi-wallah. The Langa and Manganiyar, singers from distant Barmer district, found new audiences in the hotels, as did folk and tribal dancers (Pandey 1999).

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[38] http://www.euromonitor.com/travel_tourism_in_India (accessed 6 March 2007). The UN World Tourism Organization notes a 'remarkable growth' of 10 per cent, more than double the world growth, in tourist arrivals in South Asian countries. More than half of those arrivals were accounted for by India. 'In a remarkable transition', the UN *Survey* observes, 'the tourism industry has displayed buoyant growth rates in each of three years'. The *Survey* goes on to quote India's NCAER as estimating tourism's contribution towards India's GDP (both direct and indirect) as 5.9 per cent. The travel and tourism market in 2005 was valued by Euromonitor at USD 42 billion. The GoI's *Economic Survey, 2007* estimates that tourism earnings crossed USD 6.6 billion in 2006. See http://www.domainb.com/economy/ecosurvey2007/20070227_overview.html (accessed 8 March 2008).

[39] See 'Economy of Rajasthan' at http://www.mapofindia.com/maps/rajasthan/economy (accessed 8 March 2008).

[40] Heritage hotels were also a way of legalizing above-ceiling property; off-loading the costs of food and drink and transportation for an extensive joint family; and providing employment to family members.

Operating a heritage hotel provided a way to enact an identity and a culture by recapitulating a style of life. The former lord who once offered gracious hospitality to fellow aristocrats and Raj officials now offered it to visitors from France, Britain, America, Italy, and Germany. Entertaining guests from Dallas, Cologne or Paris by taking them on an overnight camel safari, complete with the traditional offering of opium, is not quite the same as taking the Prince of Wales or a visiting fellow nobleman on a tiger shoot, but it preserves the role of host and the spirit of adventure while adding a certain exoticism.

Here is the language that the heritage hotel website uses to bridge the gap between then and now, between princely Rajasthan and tourist Rajasthan:

> For decades, the Rajput fortress, the defensive Castle, the composite Haveli — was the abode of the nobility where hospitality was a way of life . . . The chivalry and gallantry of the warrior clans was reflected in the architecture of the feudal homes. Post-Independence democratic India witnessed the merger of the Princely States [and] . . . abolition of 'jagirs' . . . The noble families lost their traditional means of livelihood . . . Now ancestral homes . . . find sustenance in this new lease of life — as Heritage Hotels. Each of these Heritage Hotels or ancestral homes is different, unique, reflecting its own, exceptional history, tradition and period. Living in a heritage hotel makes one feel like a king![41]

What does this narrative tell us about the transformation of the Rajputs from being a landed class to middle class? Preserving their Rajput identity and way of life helps them to succeed in the hospitality business. But preservation is not good enough to ensure success in business. Becoming and remaining successful as proprietors of heritage hotels entails for the Rajputs the challenge of replicating and modernizing their material and cultural inheritance even as they maintain and cultivate it. Can they maintain the authenticity (Barnes 1998; Rudolph and Rudolph 2003)[42] of their Rajput way of life and of their properties? Can they remain convincingly 'royal' if they replicate and modernize these properties? As the tourist and hospitality business expands in scope and rationalizes, can the criteria and standards that define Rajput heritage hotels avoid the slippery slope that leads from replication through modernization to theme park architecture and culture? How should we judge, for example, the replicated Indo-Saracenic castle architecture, amenities and liveried staff of the Taj group's recently built top-of-the-line hotel in Jaipur, the Raj Vilas, at which former American President Bill Clinton stayed for two days in March 2000?

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[41] http://www.HeritageHotelsofRajasthan.com (accessed 8 March 2008).

[42] Julian Barnes's novel *England, England* (1998) explores the elusive nature of authenticity by imagining replicating 'England' on the Isle of

A way out is visible in the way Rajputs in the heritage hotel business forge hybrid identities that blend 'landed class' with 'middle class'. A credible Rajput hybridity has to be a work in progress, one that goes beyond the preservation and conservation of Rajput heritage to an authenticity that adapts that heritage to changing times. A credible heritage-hotel Rajput identity combines being a believable lord of the manor with being a successful businessman. Rajputs succeed as middle-class hotel proprietors to the extent that they are able to preserve the culture and identity of aristocrats.

Wight as a tourist attraction. Like Baudrillard, he problematizes authenticity by showing that modern technology makes it possible to replicate everything, from art to human life. When simulacra, representations of the original, can displace the original, the authentic becomes difficult to grasp.

6

Are Rich Rural Jats Middle-class?

Roger Jeffery, Patricia Jeffery* and *Craig Jeffrey

Introduction

Manjula (one of our research assistants) said to Savita (a woman from a rich Jat family in Nangal) that girls in villages generally don't wear the kind of clothes that Savita's daughter Sumita was wearing — pant-shirt with denim jeans. Savita said, 'Sumita's father likes it. He doesn't like shalwar suit. He himself brings these sorts of clothes for her. The *mahaul* [atmosphere] of our house is completely like that of a town. This one wears only frocks and pant-shirts. One shalwar suit has been sewn for her, but it is just lying unworn. When my *nandot* [husband's sister's daughter] was married, Sumita's father himself went to Meerut and brought pant-shirt for Sumita. I said that everyone would be coming for the wedding and that he should not get her to wear such clothes, but he did not pay any heed' . . . Patricia Jeffery asked whether people in the village object to this. Savita said, 'We don't go anywhere in the village. We remain just in the house. We don't even step out of the gate. Though we sometimes have to go to neighbours' homes to call on people, our *muhalla* [neighbourhood] is very good. No one says anything. Well, they all know who we are. There are two to four houses in the village that are very good, in whose homes there is a *bilkul shahron-wala mahaul* [completely urban atmosphere]. One is our house. One is the newish *haveli* [imposing house] near the bus stand — those people are also quite wealthy. One is the *daroga-ji*'s [ex-Police Inspector's] house. These families are such that it does not feel like you are in a village when you are with them. All the luxuries and comforts are like in the town . . . When Sumita needs to go to the bazaar or to Bijnor, she goes with her father, sitting on the scooter or in the car. So then there is no question of anyone saying anything'. (Field notes: Savita and Sumita, 21 November 2001).[1]

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[1] This and other extracts are taken from our field notes, based on notes taken at the time, written down in Hindi within 24 hours, and translated by one of the authors. All personal names are pseudonyms.

In 2000–02, while we were carrying out fieldwork in Nangal, in Bijnor district, western Uttar Pradesh (UP), we had several conversations of this kind. We had sought out households from a range of social and economic categories, but we encountered a set of a dozen Jat households that were set apart socially and economically. In a light-hearted fashion, we termed these households 'seriously rich', because their concerns, dispositions, orientations, and lifestyles set them apart even from the other relatively rich farmers in the village. Although discussions of the middle classes in contemporary India usually presume that they are urban residents, we shall argue in this essay that it is also possible to be middle-class, albeit somewhat problematically, whilst living in the countryside. Within the village, the seriously rich farmers and, to a lesser extent, below them, the next rung of rich Jat farmers, are clearly in a league of their own, economically and politically, and few can match their status-related claims. Beyond the village, however, they face problems maintaining their status, because they cannot easily shake off the taint of the rural, particularly when it comes to cultural capital (for example, the quality of their education) and marriage arrangements.

In this essay we consider the status positioning and the social and economic reproductive strategies of rich Jats — the seriously rich and those immediately below them in social class terms — in Nangal. We explore several themes: how far these Jat families wish to diversify out of agriculture (for instance, by establishing businesses or seeking white-collar work for their sons); how far they have been successful in this aim (Harriss 1982; Jeffrey 2001; Rutten 1995; Sanghera and Harriss-White 1995); and how they are attempting to raise their social standing by, among other things, removing family members from direct cultivation of the soil, offering large dowries at the time of their daughters' marriages, limiting the size of their families, and investing in education (see also, e.g., Breman 1993; Gidwani and Sivaramakrishnan 2003; Jeffery and Jeffery 1997; Upadhya 1988).

In these efforts, they clearly derive some benefits from their rural location (through their incomes from the land, and their freedom to construct substantial houses on their own land, for example), but these benefits come at a cost. In common discourse, 'the urban' is a touchstone for what it means to be 'modern', and both also connote 'middle-class' in contemporary India — for all that urban poverty and rural progress are also acknowledged. Such polyvalent links were not made explicitly by our respondents. Indeed, the Jats never used the words 'middle class' or their Hindi equivalents. But in our discussions with them, such resonances were unmistakeable, as we demonstrate in the following sections. In the rest of this essay we describe how rich Jats negotiate the dilemmas of their rural residence, through the rural–urban social networks they maintain, and their attempts to cultivate an 'urban' or 'modern' style *within* their rural homes and villages (see, for other comparable discussions, Jeffery and Jeffery 1997; Jeffrey 1997, 2001; Upadhya 1988).[2]

Placing farmers in a class system

Satish Deshpande has convincingly argued that contemporary popular discussions of the Indian class structure and the position of the 'middle classes' are misleading, and that the 'middle class' is 'an affluent class with a very skewed caste-community and regional composition' (Deshpande 2006b: 234). Sociological studies of the Indian class structure, and of mobility between social class positions, are few and far between.[3] Many discussions, such as those based on data from the National Sample Survey (NSS) or surveys carried out by the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER), tend not to use a very sophisticated set of criteria for allocating occupations to broad social classes. Of the sociological accounts, many are restricted to urban areas and occupations (e.g., Driver and Driver 1987), and an influential recent account (Fernandes 2006) is essentially concerned with an even narrower segment, distinguished particularly by its consumption patterns and comprising professionally qualified employees of large companies based in metropolitan cities. Those authors concerned with social differentiation in *rural* areas (such as M. Chaudhuri 1987; Patnaik 1976; see also Thorner 1981) have focused purely on rural relationships and classes, though they have often located their discussion in the context of changing structures and processes of international capitalism.

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[2] We are putting on one side questions of 'class for itself', i.e., the relationships of these Jats to political and social movements, whether for collective class or caste mobility.

[3] We are indebted to Divya Vaid, who permitted us to see a chapter in her DPhil thesis (Vaid 2007), on which we have drawn heavily in this paragraph. More detail on her work can be found in Vaid (2005, 2007).

Several recent attempts to produce a national classification of classes based entirely on class relationships and rankings within India have been based on the election survey data of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) (S. Kumar, Heath and Heath 2002). Kumar et al., unsure of where to place people whose main source of income is agriculture (probably more than half the Indian population!), propose that the salariat and the business class are roughly equal; that the lower salariat are below them, followed by the skilled, petty business and farming classes, with the unskilled and lower agriculturalists being at the bottom (ibid.).

In what is apparently the first serious attempt to include urban and rural India within a single national class classification, Vaid (2005) goes well beyond Kumar et al. (2002) and distinguishes 'large' farmers (those with more than 10 acres of land) from 'medium' farmers (those with 5–10 acres of land) and the rest (those with less than 5 acres). She then goes on to list five class categories:

1. High Professionals and Managers, plus Large Business and Large Farmers
2. Lower Professionals and Managers
3. Routine Non-manual (a) (Clerical), plus Petty Business, and Skilled Manual Workers
4. Small Farmers, plus Routine Non-Manual (b) (Service)
5. Semi- and Un-skilled Workers, plus Lower Agriculturalists

Whilst recognizing that land is not all the same, and that a large or remote tract of sandy soil will generate far less income than a small irrigated plot near a town, she nonetheless argues that the separation of the 'large' farmers from the rest could be validated: 'where the different classes were compared on the basis of certain outcomes like housing (pucca, kutcha etc.) and asset ownership (ranging from ownership of radios, TVs to cars and houses, including more rural assets like pumps, bullock carts and tractors)'.[4]

Certainly, for most sociological purposes, occupation *by itself* is not a very useful criterion for understanding social class, especially where the middle class is concerned. For example, David Lockwood fruitfully distinguishes three basic elements in his discussion of class situation: *market* situation (including income levels and how they are come by, the security of that income, and the possibility of upward mobility); *work* situation (how members of this class relate to others in relationships of subordination and superordination in the workplace); and *status* situation (the multifarious ways in which the members of a class distinguish themselves (through their lifestyles) from those they regard as below them in the pecking order, and emulate those above them) (Lockwood 1989 [1958]). All three elements are necessary to understand the class situation of rich farmers in contemporary western UP.

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[4] Personal communication with Divya Vaid, 25 February 2007.

Bijnor district and Nangal village

Bijnor district is one of UP's northwestern districts, located to the east of the River Ganges as it emerges from the Himalayan foothills, about 100 miles northeast of Delhi. Compared to other parts of UP, the district is relatively wealthy (counted among the top 14 of the 63 districts in 2000 (A. K. Singh 2001: Table VIII. 8). The Bijnor countryside is intensively cultivated, and has benefitted from an assured water supply since the mid-1960s, mainly using private tube-well irrigation. Improved varieties of sugarcane, wheat and rice are the overwhelmingly dominant crops. The district is less affluent, though, than districts to the west of the Ganges (Meerut, Muzaffarnagar, Saharanpur) that have had canal irrigation since the end of the 19th century. As a Jat farmer in Nangal put it, 'There is one main reason for the difference between the Jats of Bijnor and Meerut districts: the Nangal [which is in Bijnor] Jats did not get tube wells until very recently. So in terms of wealth and attitudes to schooling, our children are 20 years behind the Jats in Meerut'. Nevertheless, like other tenant farmers with a good title to their land, the Jats of Bijnor benefited greatly from the land reforms of the 1950s and 1960s, which gave them security and encouraged investment in irrigation. Farmers such as these provided the core of a political class (led for many years by Chaudhary Charan Singh) that argued successfully for a variety of agricultural subsidies (most notably, freedom from taxation on agricultural incomes, cheap access to electrical power for agriculture, and support prices for sugarcane, wheat and rice) (Brass 1985: 156; Byres 1988; Drèze and Gazdar 1997). These policies provided a platform for the consolidation and upward mobility of Jat (and other) land-owners across north India, especially in Haryana and Punjab, but also in western UP (Byres 1986; Duncan 1997; Hasan 1998).

There is little by way of a large-scale manufacturing industry in the main towns of Bijnor district — apart from sugar processing — and nothing comparable to the extensive ribbon development of industrial activities in the Delhi–Ghaziabad–Meerut–Muzaffarnagar corridor. Nevertheless, the completion of the Madhya Ganga Barrage across the Ganges near Bijnor town in the mid-1980s enhanced trading and communication opportunities with Delhi, Meerut and Muzaffarnagar.

Nangal lies about 10 miles southeast of Bijnor town. In 2001, its population was about 5,300, of which 48 per cent were Chamars, 26 per cent Jats, and 12 per cent Muslims. The remaining population mainly comprised Brahmins and members of the Other Backward Classes (OBCs). About 20 per cent of the households in Nangal were landless, and another 40 per cent did not have enough land for subsistence. Despite their recent classification as OBC, the Jats owned 83 per cent of the agricultural land in Nangal in 2001. By contrast, the Chamars in Nangal, who possessed only 8 per cent of the agricultural land, primarily worked as manual wage labourers on local farms or in industrial units owned by the Jats of Nangal or the surrounding villages. Eighty-eight per cent of the Jat households possessed more than 1.2 acres in 2001. Most also owned two-storied brick houses, and many possessed televisions and motorcycles. Some Jats had also invested agricultural surplus in business ventures, and they managed shops, schools and several small industrial units in and around Nangal. The richer Jats had good social links with the urban areas of western UP and considerable influence within local government bureaucracies.

Within Nangal, we identified two sets of rich farmers in 2001. We distinguished 12 'seriously rich' households (out of 239 Jat households in Nangal), considered so because they owned at least 15 acres of irrigated agricultural land, lived in a house with six or more rooms and internal plumbing, owned (or had access to) a car, and possessed air cooling of some kind (usually powered by their own generator). Additionally, all employed at least one farm worker on a permanent basis, as well as at least one domestic servant. The second set of 46 'rich' peasant households shared some, but not all, of the characteristics of the seriously rich. These 'rich' peasants owned at least 10 acres of irrigated land, and the remaining five privately owned cars in Nangal, but lived in smaller houses (with only four or five rooms, on average) with fewer domestic facilities. In what follows, we shall focus on the 12 seriously rich households, but also draw on material from other households that sheds light on processes common to both these sets.

In terms of the *market situation*, then, we accept Vaid's cut-off of 10 acres to distinguish rich farmers from medium farmers. In a highly irrigated region such as western UP, and with political protection for the procurement price of their major cash crops, 10 acres of land is sufficient to provide a surplus for an average-sized household. The higher cut-off (of 15 acres) that we use for the seriously rich farmers reflects their much greater capacity to reinvest that surplus in off-farm economic activities over the past two decades or so (see Jeffrey 2001). In terms of their *work situation*, the male members of the seriously rich group never, as far as we could tell, carried out hard manual labour, on or off their own farms. As owners, they 'managed' their land, rarely even driving their own tractors. Savita described the work of her husband, a 47-year-old with a BA, as follows:

> The farming is done only by a servant. My husband just goes once or twice by scooter and does a round. Sometimes the sugarcane has to be weighed, so he remains there to supervise. Or there is some other essential task and he goes to oversee it. Otherwise he only has an interest in business or service. Even now, he is storing *jagri* [semi-refined sugar] and he will sell it later. He is also the manager of a school. (Field notes: Savita, 21 November 2001)

Younger male members of these households (men aged 25 or above) were mostly resident and involved in some part of the family business. Nonetheless, unlike the 'landlords' in the district, whether absentee or resident, these households did not employ farm managers to take over all the daily responsibilities.

Some households that farmed 10–15 acres did so largely using family labour. But almost all the heavy manual tasks (ploughing, sowing, weeding, and harvesting) were done either by casual or seasonal labourers, or by contracting this work out, either for a fixed sum or on a sharecropping basis. In these households, more of the older generation could be seen driving tractors, and occasionally being involved in maintaining them and their other agricultural equipment. The younger members of these families were often found to be in extended education, sometimes living in nearby towns or in cities such as Delhi or Moradabad, apparently as part of strategies to continue applying for permanent urban jobs and to avoid having to engage in agriculture themselves.

The extent to which a household has already successfully withdrawn from agriculture does not depend directly and solely on the current household landholding. Some households, especially, but not only, the seriously rich, had diversified the sources of their income (e.g., through running a brickworks, a cane-crusher, a potato cold storage, or a small business, or through having invested heavily in their children's education, leading to their employment in secure, well-paying jobs). Some of the 'rich' had to sell some land to finance these efforts. A synchronic snapshot would fail to pick up these different trajectories.

In general, then, using the criteria of market and work situations, the rich and the seriously rich farmers alike were found to be clearly differentiated from those owning smaller areas of land, or none. As with all such criteria, slightly altering the selection criteria would add or subtract a few households on the margins to each set. For example, the main reasons we have excluded five car-owning households from the seriously rich category is that they used these cars as taxis, rather than retaining them solely for personal use; and their houses were smaller and less ostentatious than those of the 12 seriously rich households. In addition, as is common in rural UP, the boundaries between households (such as between brothers, or a father and his sons) were often fuzzy: sometimes the ownership of major assets (like land, or a car) was shared even though consumption expenditures could be separate (e.g., there were two or more cooking hearths), and we have made several somewhat ad hoc decisions about whether to treat these as joint or separate households.[5]

We now move to consider more directly what Lockwood calls *status situation*: how far rich Jat farmers in Nangal can be said to be following specifically 'middle-class' lifestyles. One aspect of this — the demographic — can be dealt with quickly: like urban middle-class couples, Jats have already moved to replacement-level fertility or below (see also Jeffery and Jeffery 1997; Jeffrey 2001). Since the 1980s, Jats, and especially the rich and the seriously rich ones, have abandoned a norm in which landed Jat families often restricted 'full' marriages, with the entitlement to inherit land, to only one of a set of brothers, while the others either shared sexual access to that brother's wife, or established other sexual relationships, whose issue were not recognized for inheritance purposes. By the 2000s, these Jats had embraced the idea of very small families: the 11 women married into seriously rich households after 1980 had only 18 children between them. The dominant explanation for a two-child family was, as Savita put it, 'because with more children you cannot pay proper attention to them; with few, that is two, children you can do their *palan-poshan* [upbringing] properly; and with two children, their schooling and clothing can be fulfilled according to your wishes' (field notes: Savita, 28 November 1990).

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[5] As a further example, we have excluded from the category of 'rich' one household of Muslims that owns 10 acres of land, because the household contains 18 people, four of whom are young married women. Two of the husbands are migrant and non-resident. These characteristics set them off from the Jats, who have much smaller households and very few migrant males.

In what follows we shall discuss three aspects of the positions of the rich Jats in Nangal: their attempts to diversify out of agriculture and the role of education for boys; their marriage strategies, with specific reference to girls' schooling and dowry; and their attempts to maintain 'middle-class' lifestyles within the village. Throughout we note how their social reproduction strategies involve links of different kinds to the urban and the urbane.

Sons' education and diversification out of agriculture

> We used to have a saying: highest is farming, middle is business, below this is service and bottom is begging [*uttam kheti, madhyam ban, neech naukri, bheekh nidan*]. In previous times, agriculture was the most excellent, and people thought of salaried employment as being below farming and business . . . Now things have been turned upside down. Service is now seen as the best and agriculture now occupies third spot. Business and begging remain in the same positions. (Field notes: Bharat Singh, 21 November 2001)

Amongst the Jats of Nangal, as in many other parts of north India, strategies of social reproduction rely heavily (but not solely) on placing sons in good jobs. Along with resources to invest, schooling is crucial to most attempts to diversify out of agriculture. Educationally, Bijnor district is not a propitious one: according to the census data for 2001 (Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India 2002), Bijnor district's literacy rate for females aged 7 or above was, at 47 per cent, above the all-UP figure of 43 per cent, while that for men was, at 70 per cent, almost exactly the same as that for UP — and in each case well below all-India figures (54 per cent and 76 per cent, respectively).

All seriously rich and rich Jat households were prepared to put considerable effort into constructing the expansive social and political webs of relationships that would nourish their children's careers and extract them from their educational backwardness. Where possible, this involved getting access to a base in a town where their children could attend school. If a relative was already living in an urban area, children or adolescent men (and more rarely, women) may be sent to stay there. Sometimes, a married couple would move into Bijnor town, in order to enrol the children in an urban school. In other cases, a room or two was rented and several young men stayed there together during the week, returning to Nangal at the weekends or for festivals.

Of the 10 men aged 25–40 from seriously rich households, seven had degrees, two had at least a Class X certificate and only one had completed fewer than nine years of schooling — all but the last having spent several years living outside Nangal to do so. The most extreme example was that of Jayanti's son, Krishna:

> Jayanti said that they sent her son Krishna to school in Dehra Dun at the age of five. He studied for two or three years in a small school there, before moving to a larger school, also in Dehra Dun. He stayed in a hostel there. At the time of this conversation Krishna was studying for a BCA [Bachelor of Computer Applications] in Modinagar. Craig asked why Krishna had been sent to schools in Dehra Dun, since there seem to be perfectly good schools in Bijnor district. Jayanti answered that he was sent there '*mahaul badalne ke liye*' [to change the environment, i.e., in order to make sure that he grew up in the right atmosphere]. She continued: 'With his good schooling he also got a taste for good manners, and learned how to talk in good society'. Jayanti said that in Bijnor the atmosphere was not good. The boys just played around, drank, smoked, and used bad language. 'The Jats, you know, they just do farming. If he had stayed and studied here he would have made friends in Suaheri' [Suaheri is infamous in Bijnor district for being

> a village in which there is a lot of criminal activity and quarrelling]. (Field notes: Jayanti, 17 October 2001)

Nonetheless, the seriously rich do not place as much emphasis on schooling and certification leading to employment as do the households in the wider category of the 'rich'. One man named Harpal was explicit in saying that 'small' service was worse than returning to the village:

> He repeated that he didn't want his sons entering service. He said that if a son was earning ₹ 15,000 and working in Delhi, 'what benefit would it be? ₹ 3,000 would be spent on his house every month and there would be other expenses. In the end he wouldn't be able to save any money. For this reason *chhoti* service [a lower-grade government post] wouldn't be of any benefit to us'. He, however, said that IAS service was a different matter. (Field notes: Harpal, 10 December 2001)

Three young men from seriously rich households had, however, migrated out of Nangal, to jobs in engineering, in government employment, and to work as a computer operator, respectively. Three fathers had invested in extensive transport enterprises for their sons to run. These businesses provided considerable prestige and allowed their owners to project an image of physical and social mobility. In addition, young men running transport businesses, we were told, could make large illegal incomes on the side through carrying stolen goods. The remaining young men from the seriously rich households returned to (or stayed in) Nangal to help run farms or other family businesses (such as those of cane-crushers, dealerships and brickworks). These enterprises typically provided somewhat uncertain financial returns, but, like clerical jobs in the informal economy, they brought young Jat men into contact with urban areas and allowed them to construct images of themselves as people 'in transition'. However, even those with successful schooling careers and certification would, at times, find that the demands of kinship overruled their continuing in employment outside the village. Santosh, one of the seriously rich young men, for example, was called home to manage the farm when his father died.

Seriously rich households also had strategies in place should their sons get jobs elsewhere and leave the village. Sarla and Manju, two women from seriously rich Jat families in Nangal, commented on the possibilities of their sons getting a job:

> For the time being, we ourselves are there to look after the farming. But later, Sandeep would leave his job and come back to look after the farm. And if he doesn't leave his job, there are plenty of other ways of looking after the farm. It can be given on sharecropping. It can also be given on contract: these days you get ₹ 5,000 per acre. Do your job in peace and come back once a year to do the accounts. There is no room for deception in that. No one can lift up the land and take it away. And if you can't do any of that, then increase the size of the mango orchard. Many people from the village who have left because of employment care for their farms in that very way. (Field notes: Sarla, 5 November 2001)

> Craig asked whether or not Manju would be happy if her son grew up to run the farm or cane crusher. At this, Manju raised her voice, saying, 'we won't put any pressure on our son, if he wants to do farming then he should do farming. Whatever he does: agriculture, running the crusher, doing business, entering government service . . . it doesn't matter, we won't put any pressure on him. He can do whatever he likes'. Manju said that he can earn money from doing anything: from farming, business, service, 'money can be earned from all sorts of things'. When Craig asked how the farm would be run if her son entered service, Manju said that he could get the farming work done through farm servants. Craig persisted, saying that it was still necessary to supervise these servants. Manju responded by saying that they had a lot of relatives in the village who could look after the farm if her son was away. (Field notes: Manju, 6 November 2001)

By contrast, the 'rich' young men had been strongly encouraged to use their schooling to escape the village: of the 60 men aged 25–40, 24 (40 per cent) had a degree and 16 (27 per cent) had at least a Class X certificate. Ten (17 per cent) had started secondary schooling, and only 9 (15 per cent) had not gone beyond eight or fewer years of schooling. But they had fewer opportunities than the seriously rich to maintain the illusion of having escaped the village: 43 (72 per cent) simply described themselves as doing *kheti* (farming). Of the remainder, seven had managed to find a government job, including two doctors living in Delhi (sons of Bharat Singh, quoted above); seven others had some kind of private employment or had been set up by their fathers in a small business; and three described themselves as students.

Continuing to study had probably marked the strategies of the 12 young men with at least a BA degree who had not managed to find employment and were either 'farming' or running a small business. These young men seemed to be marking time, using the 'front' of studenthood as a way of putting off confronting the reality of unemployment. The case of Sonu epitomizes some of their responses. Clean-shaven and with carefully groomed hair, Sonu dressed in immaculate blue denim jeans, often with leather boots and dark glasses, and rode a 250cc Kawasaki motorbike. He spoke in a crisp Hindi scattered with English words like 'batch-mate', 'timepass' and 'exam'. The eldest of three children, Sonu was in his mid-twenties in 2001. His family home consisted of an eight-roomed brick house in the centre of Nangal, complete with a lavatory with flush and colour television. They had no car, but his father and his father's elder brother owned about 20 acres of agricultural land between them, placing them just inside our category of the 'rich'. His father had a BEd and MA, and was teaching in a government secondary school in Uttarakhand. His mother, Sarla, had a Class X certificate and came from a wealthy rural family from the neighbouring Meerut district. Sonu was educated in Nangal till Class VIII, then stayed with his mother's brother in Meerut district to complete Class IX, and took Classes X–XII at the school in Uttarakhand where his father taught. He obtained a BSc in Mathematics from a degree college in Moradabad, southeast of Nangal. Sonu was married in 2000 to a young woman with an MA degree, hailing from a large village 20 or so miles from Nangal. In 2001, he lived with his wife in Moradabad, continuing to study while earning from the coaching classes he delivered. He would go to Nangal once a fortnight to see his mother and sister, check on the family farm, and collect milk and *ghee* (clarified butter).

Sonu's father had been willing to spend on his sons' education 'as far as money would allow', though he had withdrawn his daughter from school after Class VIII out of a fear that she would acquire a bad name. Sonu's mother spoke of the difficulty of balancing her housework with caring for the schooling needs of her children, and the constant vigilance required to ensure that her son completed homework, went to school suitably dressed and groomed, and was well supplied with learning aids. As a high school pass herself, she could assist Sonu with his homework only up to Class VIII, though she could, as she put it, create a *sabhyata ka mahaul* (civilized environment) in which he could study.

Sonu had been unable, till the time of our interaction, to get government employment, and he blamed his failures on his lack of contacts and of money for bribes. He described how other young men with good social contacts bribed an official to place them above him in the merit list for the Basic Teaching Certificate, and how he failed to negotiate a position as a sub-inspector in the UP police. As he told us, 'Everywhere there is *bhrashtachar* [corruption]. What can we do?' He had responded to repeated frustration in his search for salaried employment by studying for further qualifications and by seeking good 'fall-back' work in the informal economy. He earned ₹ 1,000 as a teacher in a private school in Moradabad and doubled this salary through giving extra-school mathematics tutorials, estimating that in two years he could be earning ₹ 3,500 a month this way. Sonu's parents had hired a permanent farm servant to assist with agricultural tasks to ensure that Sonu could devote his efforts to finding suitable secure employment outside farming. Sonu saw himself as 'someone marked out for government service', repeatedly affirming that he was 'in a stage of transition' towards a position more suited to his ability and destiny.

Sonu's case points to three central features of the strategies of educated un/under employed young men from 'rich' Jat households in Nangal: financial and imaginative *reinvestment* in education (for themselves and for their own children); the determination to find salaried employment; and the eagerness to remove themselves from manual toil in the fields. Many educated young Jat men believed that by acquiring additional qualifications they could improve their prospects in the search for government work, or something of nearly equivalent status, such as a managerial position in a large private firm. Other young Jat men said that they continued to study simply as a means of countering boredom and appeasing their parents. While students, they could occasionally meet to socialize with friends and maintain contact with urban life. The cost of studying for a degree in local government and private colleges was low — usually between ₹ 1,000 and ₹ 3,000 a year — compared to the capital and income of rich Jat households. The personal cost to young men of enrolling in local colleges was also minimal, since lecturers rarely turned up, students typically attended just once or twice a week, and there was little or no assessed coursework: students had only to appear for examinations to qualify. Few young men were interested in their degree courses or imagined that their education would provide useful skills for their careers. Struggling in poorly funded colleges, with few teachers willing to provide instruction, and disillusioned by the limited relevance of their syllabi, students frequently imagined their colleges as 'degree shops', the sole utility of which was to provide a paper certificate.

Many rich, young Jat men interpreted their educated standing not only as a marker of distinction (*nishan*), but also as a sign of their family moving out of village 'uselessness' (*bekari*) towards urban success (*safalta*) and development (*vikas*). Disappointment in the search for government jobs had encouraged most young rich Jat men to 'scale up' their educational and familial ambitions, acquiring further degrees themselves and planning prestigious schooling careers for their children. Further, their rhetorical emphasis on the value of education seemed to intensify during their experience of struggling in vain for secure white-collar work.

Rich Jat parents often allowed their sons to prolong their educational careers and move between insecure employment during their twenties and early thirties, supplementing what little their sons earned in this way. In line with broader gendered assumptions in western UP and India, Jat parents expected young men to spend a period of their early adulthood 'wandering about' and experimenting with different forms of work (De Haan 2003). Many of the fathers of educated un/under-employed young Jat men had themselves spent long periods searching in vain for salaried employment in the 1970s or 1980s. Jat men who were fathers of men in their twenties and thirties at the time of our fieldwork tended to sympathize with their sons' predicaments and protected them from the comments of other villagers. For example, Sonu's father, Bedpal, spent eight years seeking a good job before he secured employment as a government teacher. Bedpal frequently referred indignantly to the mixture of bad luck and corrupt practice that prevented Sonu from succeeding in his search for government service. Bedpal labelled Sonu an 'Indian Administrative Services (IAS) hopeful' — someone with all the hallmarks of becoming a high-ranking public servant — and called local recruitment officials stupid and venal. In such ways, Bedpal attempted to boost Sonu's confidence and protect him from criticism while also maintaining the social standing of his household in the village.

Jat parents actively assisted their sons in the search for good fallback employment within state bureaucracies or the private sector, for example, by using friendship to access clerical posts in a private Delhi-based shoe factory, or by capitalizing on their influence within the upper echelons of the police to obtain temporary posts in the local constabulary. In these and several other examples, Jats were able to trade on their middle-caste status and historical associations with the local government to forge effective social links.[6] Moreover, where rich Jats did not have close connections in relevant sections of the government or the private economy, they were often able to hire reliable *dalal*s (urban brokers), who acted as paid representatives for candidates during negotiations with recruitment officials. In these ways, Jat parents, especially fathers, found ways to improvise, even in the absence of secure government work.

The 'scaling up' of Jat educational ambitions in response to un/under-employment was found to be geographical as well as social: educated young Jat men imagined the process of personal and familial development as one of moving out from the village to acquire connections, property, and reputations in successively larger urban settlements and, if possible, abroad. When seriously rich young Jat men in Nangal spoke of Bijnor town as an unsuitable environment for the education of their own children, they drew upon invective usually directed at village life. Bijnor was 'rustic and unruly', and these men wanted their offspring to study in the more sanitized and civilized environment of Meerut, Dehra Dun or New Delhi. In these discussions, at least, young men, including those from the ranks of the seriously rich, demonstrated their awareness not only of the need for urban contacts and experiences to validate their status claims, but also of the 'disappearing horizon', as those with such links pulled the ladder of social prestige and social mobility up behind them. In their strategies for overcoming these barriers, marriage (and the marriages of their sisters and cousins) could play an important part.

Marriage strategies for daughters and sons

> Nangal is a Jat village, and where did the Jats used to be educated? Perhaps only one or two were educated. And now, *parhai ka zamana* [the era of education] has arrived. Now Jats are also starting to get educated.

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[6] In the 1950s in south India, Srinivas (1995) observed how middle castes were effective in building social contacts upwards within the Hindu caste hierarchy. In Nangal, even if 'being Jat' was not an advantage in every case, Jat religious and caste identity is unlikely to have been a major hindrance in efforts to establish useful urban contacts.

> If they weren't educated, who would marry them? (Field notes: Ompal, 21 November 2001)

Schooling levels as well as employment prospects are now central to the negotiations over marriages. The importance of schooling is such that many families dissemble about the level achieved by their children. When we carried out the household census in Nangal, we took at face value the claims made about the level of schooling achieved. But closer enquiry revealed, for example, that one daughter said to have completed 12 years of schooling had in fact completed only eight. We heard several other stories of marriages that nearly foundered once deceptions about the level of schooling were discovered.

Weddings of daughters and sons alike offer opportunities for display, and successful marriage arrangements establish tangible evidence of a family's social equivalents. Getting daughters educated to a level that will help them attract a well-placed husband (at a level of dowry that her parents can afford) is something that has only recently become an essential part of the strategies of most rich Jat households. Among the seriously rich households, of the six 'daughters of the village' aged between 25 and 40 for whom we have information, four (all married in the 1980s) had completed primary schooling but had gone no further than Class VIII, whereas the two married in the 1990s both had BA degrees. Among the 'rich' households, of the 41 'daughters of the village' aged between 25 and 40 for whom we have information, one was reported to be illiterate, and three had completed only primary schooling. But three of these were married in the 1980s or earlier; of the 30 married in the 1990s, only two had not completed eight years of schooling. Eight had a degree, of whom six had a master's qualification.

In many cases, as with two adolescent women from one of the seriously rich households, the higher stages of schooling were done as 'private' students in order to maintain *izzat* (respectability).[7] The alternative — making use of kinship links through women to provide them with safe havens in towns — was used for some girls, often in the same families. Sita's mother told us that in order for Sita to study regularly at high school in Bijnor town, she stayed in her mother's mother's house. After that she appeared for Class XII as a 'private' student. Sita's family felt that Nangal's mahaul was bad: to allow girls to come and go daily by bus even just as far as Jhalu, 6 km away, was a constant worry, and very few were prepared to allow their daughters to cycle the 5 km to Haldaur for Class IX and above. Many families expressed the fear that a girl's reputation was at grave risk in such circumstances. Although the towns were also not safe, the allure of a *parhai ka mahaul* (educational environment) persuaded some parents that the risks could be minimized, especially if they could find some place in one of the new colonies for their daughter to stay (Jeffery et al. 2006).

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[7] 'Private' students register for higher secondary classes but study at home, using textbooks and primers, or take correspondence courses. They have to mix with other students only when taking the examinations.

One man told us that he had sold some land in order to finance the marriage of his daughter into a family that owns a cane-crusher: 'Nowadays', he said, 'even an "ordinary" marriage amongst the Jats costs the girl's side a minimum of ₹ 200,000'. One of the wealthiest families in the village told a story of greater problems:

> Meena's marriage was particularly early. She was only in BSc part I at the time. We managed to find a very good boy. Where can you find someone with a good salaried job amongst the Jats? My husband said that we should take the chance while it is there. He said that we are not as rich as they were and the boy was not as fair as Meena. But everyone said, and we also thought: 'what does it matter about the boy's colour?' We saw the boy's earnings and thought that she should marry him. We gave a lot. But, even so, the boy's side — their minds are not right — they asked for ₹ 20 lakh [₹ 2 million]. We spent ₹ 20 lakh on the marriage. We bought a car for ₹ 5 lakh [₹ 500,000] and three sets of gold jewellery. The boy's side wanted the ₹ 20 lakh in cash. But how could we do this? We could not send our daughter empty-handed. At the time of the marriage, the boy was in service in Kharagpur [West Bengal]. So we thought that we should send the dowry there. But the boy's side was not prepared for this. Now all the things and the car are here [in the boy's family home in Bijnor district] and the boy has gone to America. It is not necessary for him to buy anything there. The company provides everything, including the flat, furniture etc. (Field notes: Jayanti, 17 October 2001)

Many women from 'rich' and seriously rich households had married outside Nangal into settlements with more urban characteristics than Nangal enjoyed — though only Jayanti's daughter went as far as the USA. We cannot be sure of the size of all the places they were married into, but at least 15 (of the 53) were in district or *tehsil* headquarter towns, and five were in cities (one in Delhi, one in Ghaziabad, one in Chandigarh and three in Meerut). Increasingly, the criteria for marriage arrangements are becoming more complex, as households maintain their original concerns (for example, with respect to the significance of the network of urban middle-class family members into which a daughter is married) as well as adjust to new expectations on behalf of the young men and women:

> Savita commented that she herself had not been asked, but that her younger sister Bina was getting married and that they [her parents] had asked the latter for her views, for they now understood that a girl's opinion should be asked. Savita said that they had found a boy for Bina who is just like what the people of the house and Bina herself wanted. They all wanted a boy in service and they had found one: the boy worked in a sugar mill, his older brother was a lawyer, and the sister a doctor in a hospital in Meerut. Savita said that it was a very good family, besides being small. They had a good house in Bijnor, and the boy also has the personality that is preferred these days. (Field notes: Savita, 28 November 1990)

Education also figured substantially in the strategies of rich Jats negotiating marriages for their sons. Jat parents had self-interested motives for seeking to prolong the period over which young men claimed to be 'searching for government work' while being engaged in semi-bourgeois jobs. By allowing young men to work in often poorly paid service-type employment, parents could advertise their sons as being on the brink of obtaining secure salaried work (*naukri milnewala aadmi*), 'a man in a state of becoming' (*honewala aadmi*), or 'youthful man' (*jawan aadmi*). This improved parents' chances of marrying their sons into wealthy, urban, well-connected families, obtaining a large dowry, and acquiring a daughter-in-law who would raise their social standing.

Ideally, most rich Jat Nangal families would have liked a daughter-in-law with the 'right' urban characteristics: wealthy, well-educated, fair, but also a homemaker and not so under the influence of urban ways that she could not adjust to village life. Such paragons were few and far between. Sonu's wife came from a well-connected rural Jat family and, as an MA graduate with an 'urban' (*shehri*) style, her presence in the home contributed to the impression of Bedpal's household being an upwardly mobile one. Sonu's parents cherished the prospect of being cared for by a young woman with a good education, taste, and a polite demeanour. In addition, she brought a considerable dowry by the standards of 10-acre Jat farmers, including a Samsung colour television, a double bed, two steel chests, gold jewellery, a sofa, a fridge, expensive clothing, and ₹ 40,000 in cash. Bedpal and Sarla said that the bride's family offered the dowry of their own free will (*apni marzi se*). But Sonu's parents 'marketed' their son as someone in line for prestigious salaried work, and this would have created the expectation that a large dowry was appropriate. Our wider observations suggested that young men who could claim to be in some type of service job were able to command larger dowries than equally educated young men unable to make such a claim.

Not surprisingly, given a tendency towards 'hypergamy' of various kinds, women married *into* rich Nangal households tended to come from comparatively smaller settlements, and relatively few were from towns, either in Bijnor or its neighbouring districts. Jats in western UP as a whole are mainly rural, but compared to an urban woman, a rural woman will have fewer useful social networks, and may not be able to handle the social demands of urbanizing families. Yet, there is also some suspicion that a girl being married from a town to a village like Nangal must have something 'wrong' with her, whether morally, physically or mentally. Her own education is the best guarantee that she will at least meet some basic needs, for example, in supervising children's schooling and their general socialization. The difficulties of finding the 'right' girl for their son exposed the limitations of Jats striving for middle-class status in very obvious ways.

Middle-class lifestyles: *'urbs in rure'*

> Manjula asked what the puppy is called and Sumita said 'Jackie'. Manjula asked why, and Savita chipped in with 'after Jackie Shroff' [the film actor], at which we all laughed . . . Sarla [the wife of Savita's husband's first cousin], who was just passing behind us, said that the puppy was going *training parhne ke liye* [to take training] at some dog home near Chandpur, and [laughing] that it was just like sending children to college hostels and you tell the people at the hostel what

> the child can and cannot eat. The puppy will stay there for one month. (Field notes: Savita and Sumita, 21 November 2001)

The seriously rich households attempted to carry out many everyday activities, even buying or training a puppy, according to urban norms. They had invested heavily in property within the village. Unlike stories we have heard about rural affluence in Punjab, where the 'White Houses' built on ancestral land are often uninhabited, these Nangal houses are in everyday use. In one case in Nangal, eight people (the families of two cousins) inhabited a 15-room jointly owned building. Although they had divided the rooms between them, they shared a courtyard, surrounded by a veranda with ornate freshly painted white and green pillars and elegant archways. The wives of the cousins could often be found there together, carrying out their daily domestic routines. As one of them explained, she spent all her time doing some housework (knitting, embroidery, etc.) and also helping her son with his school work. Properties like these stood out in the village: not only were they double-storied, but they also had marble flooring and facings, ceiling fans and air-coolers. There were also dining-tables, sofa-sets, and TVs with crocheted covers. The latrines had 'flush', and each household had its own bathroom. Not surprisingly, as one man put it: 'What is available in towns [that isn't in villages]? Now in the villages, too, you can obtain everything, everything is comfortable now'.[8]

Yet, this claim is belied by other aspects of their housing. Some but not all the accoutrements of contemporary urban middle-class life are there. Most families use a multitude of cooking fuels: LPG (liquefied petroleum gas), *gobar* gas (methane derived from cattle dung), as well as *uple* (cow-dung cakes) or wood in a mud-based hearth, which is used for special dishes like *urad ki dal* or *karhi* that are best cooked slowly. Similarly, refrigerators are not fully used because the electricity supply is erratic; there are few washing-machines (women wash with hands at least some of the family's clothing). The housework also includes overseeing some farm-related activities (such as the storing and drying of harvested crops). The image of urban living is also somewhat marred by muddy approaches to the houses, the presence of large metal grain godowns, agricultural equipment lying around outside, or crops spread out to dry, and then stored within one of the rooms until prices have risen high enough to make a good sale possible. And the farm animals (with their associated noises, smells, foodstuffs and dirt) are close by. Such households often have one or two permanent live-in male farm servants, and a village woman who comes in to clean and remove rubbish.

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[8] These comments contrast with labourers' 'urban imaginary': as they see it, village life is 'useless' because there is no work, whereas in towns there is, the wages are better, the pay is given the same day, and caste discrimination is much less.

For the rich, the availability of goods in the villages does not remove their concerns regarding the other negative sides of village life. They are aware of the limits to which they can create an urban atmosphere for themselves in the context of the village. The desire for 'good' education immediately brings up contrasts with towns. Most people think that an 'educational environment' can be found only in the towns (Jeffery et al. 2006). To begin with, the urban government and private schools alike are reckoned to be of much better quality than those found in the villages. Good tutors (often teachers at the better schools) are also only to be found in towns. Furthermore, real 'English-medium' schooling is to be found only in towns — the larger the better. And then there is what happens outside the school itself:

> She said that the mahaul in Nangal is not good and they do not let the children wander around in the village after school, because they pick up bad language from the *Chamar-chhota* [i.e., the lower castes], and that is why they intend to send the children to Bijnor for education, as they will learn bad habits in Nangal. (Field notes: Savita, 28 November 1990)

Savita's in-laws had, indeed, invested heavily in urban property between 1990 and when we talked to her again in 2001. They had refurbished one of the largest houses in Bijnor town, primarily for Savita's childless sister-in-law (HZ), but Savita's son (aged 15 in 2001) and daughter (aged 12) were both staying there with their grandmother (FM) while studying in Bijnor. Savita admitted that the village background had been a problem for her children: she would have liked them both to have been in an English-medium school, but their English *neev* (foundation) was weak, and they were unable to manage in the language.

Within Nangal, Sonu, like other young Jat men, could successfully claim his standing as an educated person. In conversations with friends, Sonu used the distinction between the *parhe-likhe* (educated) — eloquent, smartly dressed, well-mannered, and independent — and the *an-parh* (uneducated) — foul-mouthed, dishevelled, rude, and needy. He elaborated on this simple division by further dividing the *sahi parhe-likhe* (truly educated), who know their accomplishments and recognize their faults, from the *naqli parhe-likhe* (counterfeit educated), who are always 'pumped up with their own importance' and incapable of critical self-reflection — these terms probably being coded ways of critiquing the educated lower castes (like the Chamars) in Nangal. But compared to the education available — even to the lower castes — in Moradabad, let alone in Delhi, the claims about education made by the Jats in Nangal seem distinctly vulnerable, especially since the Jats have limited control of English.

Rich Jat farmers in Nangal, then, by 'urban' meant the suburban 'colonies' of Bijnor or other towns of a population of approximately 100,000 or (preferably) larger. They described the greater possibility in such towns of establishing social exclusion (maintaining social distance from the lower castes, Muslims and poor people generally); the possibility of regular electricity supply, especially in the evenings; and a general air of cleanliness, progress and being 'modern'. Not surprisingly, in the light of these concerns, the rich Jats displayed an awareness of the inadequacy of their efforts to create the urban in the village. They could use conspicuous consumption and refined manners to drive home their difference from their poorer rural neighbours, but their efforts at gaining complete acceptance into the urban middle classes were always vulnerable to irruptions of rural elements into their urban claims.

Conclusion

The trajectories of distinctly rich peasant classes vary regionally, but we can identify three central features of the reproductive strategies of these rich Jats, which place them well within the cultural sphere of the middle classes. First, they have attempted to diversify out of agriculture by establishing businesses or seeking white-collar work for their sons. Second, they have tried to raise their social standing by removing family members from direct cultivation of the soil, investing in education, offering large dowries at the time of their daughters' marriages, and limiting the size of their families. Efforts to maintain and even raise their social position, then, involve rich Jats in Nangal strategizing around education, marriage links and urban networks, and positioning themselves as well as possible for the future by having fewer children and investing heavily in the schooling of the next generation. These very individualistic strategies, we would argue, help to locate rich Jats, and especially the seriously rich ones, in Nangal within the broad church of the Indian middle classes. Finally, they have built strong rural–urban social networks, often through colonizing and co-opting the local state and cultivating an 'urban' or 'modern' style, even *within* their rural homes and villages. They have actively acquired the accoutrements of urban *and urbane* middle-class life, even whilst constantly trying to keep the taint of the rustic and the rural at bay.

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Being and becoming middle-class: Work, domesticity and consumption

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7

Software and the ‘New’ Middle Class in the ‘New India’

Carol Upadhya

Much has been written about the emergence of a ‘new’ middle class in India. More affluent, transnational and consumerist than the ‘old’ middle class, it is usually associated with liberalization, the opening up of the economy since the late 1980s and the consequent rapid growth experienced in some sectors. With rising incomes, multiplying global connections and the influx of new consumer goods, the new middle class has become most visible through the consumer-oriented lifestyles that have dramatically appeared in Indian cities. The landscapes of cities such as Bangalore and Hyderabad have been transformed almost overnight by expensive apartment complexes and gated communities, posh shopping malls with multiplex theatres, upscale restaurants and specialty stores, the multiplicity of luxury cars clogging the roads, and a range of leisure and support services catering to the global lifestyles of the ‘new rich’ — all testifying to the enhanced purchasing power and changing consumption patterns of some segments of the population. Hence, representations of the middle class that are purveyed by the media, by advertising and marketing agencies as well as by academics, have converged around the idea that it has become a ‘consuming class’ (see Fernandes 2006: Chapter 2; Mankekar 1999; Mazzarella 2003; Rajagopal 1999).

But there are other aspects of this transformation of the middle class that have received somewhat less attention. Perhaps the most important is its relation to the changing economy and the consequent profound changes in its ideological and cultural orientations. As several scholars have noted, the origins of the middle class can be traced to the colonial period, but it established dominance especially under the post-Independence Nehruvian developmental regime.[1] Benefiting from the expansion of higher

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[1] Deshpande (2003: Chapter 6) and Fernandes (2000a, 2006) have traced the transformation and differentiation of the Indian middle class under liberalization. It must be emphasized that what has been termed

education, government and the public sector during this period, its social and economic base was rooted in the state. Ideologically, the middle class was imbued with the ideals of national economic development, self-sufficiency and individual sacrifice for the nation (Deshpande 2003: 144–46; Fernandes 2006: 20–24). While the 'old' middle class was dependent on public-sector jobs, the 'new' middle class locates itself primarily within the rapidly expanding private sector and the globalized economy (Fernandes 2006: Chapter 3). It may be better defined as an upper segment of the middle class, consisting primarily of managerial–professional elites, and one that has most benefited from liberalization. It is also a social group that is 'interpellated by globalization in the same . . . way that, a generation or two ago, it identified itself with development' (Deshpande 2003: 150).

As Fernandes (2006) points out, the contrast between the 'old' and the 'new' middle class is not so much one of substance or identity — for the new is largely derived from and identical with the old in terms of its social composition — but more of ideology, political and economic orientation, and culture. One of the roles of the Nehruvian middle class, Deshpande suggests, was to 'articulate the hegemony of the ruling bloc', which it did through its control over the developmental state and the legitimizing ideology of development (Deshpande 2003: 139). With the demise of this dominant ideology, and as the middle class has shifted its allegiance from the state to the market, it has had to reorient itself ideologically,

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the 'new middle class' is but one section of a much larger and diversified class that includes a 'lower middle class' that continues to depend on government and public-sector jobs, as well as the newly rich in rural and semi-urban areas who aspire to enter the urban middle classes. However, it is the 'new' middle class — the segment that is globalized, highly educated, professional, and upwardly mobile — which is the focus of this essay.

I use the terms 'class' and 'middle class' advisedly, for their definitions in the Indian (and in any) context are the subject of much dispute. Objectively, in terms of wealth, much of the 'middle class' should be called an elite or upper class. Moreover, people who regard themselves as middle-class include the poor as well as the rich. Despite the fuzziness of the category and the problems inherent in a structural analysis of class, the term is retained by scholars precisely because it is such a salient category of self-identity for many Indians, as I show in this essay.

for instance by producing 'celebratory rhetoric about globalization' (ibid.: 150). It has also had to discursively reinvent itself and its place in the nation (as is evident in media and state discourses about India's 'awakening') and in its own self-representations. Increasingly, the new middle class has come to define and represent the nation as a whole.

In this essay, I explore some aspects of this cultural and ideological refashioning of the middle class, viewed through the lens of the flagship industry of India's new economy — the software industry. The rapidly expanding software services and export industry (also referred to as the information technology industry or IT) has come to represent the 'new India' that is striving to become a global economic and political player, and the founders and leaders of this industry have assumed intellectual, economic and ideological leadership of the new middle class, and indeed of the nation as a whole. Moreover, employees of this industry — the 'IT professionals' — constitute a highly visible section of the new middle class. By examining the self-representations of the IT industry and the narratives of the people involved in it, I attempt to highlight some aspects of the identity, power and culture of the new middle class in the contemporary period. Specifically, I argue that the software outsourcing industry has played a pivotal role, both structurally and discursively, in the production of the 'new middle class', the consolidation of its hegemony and the articulation of its new dominant ideology.

I explore several planes on which the Indian software industry and the new middle class are mutually imbricated in one another. First, the success of the industry, in large part, has been based on its ability to tap the accumulated cultural and social capital of the 'old' middle class, which has supplied its army of 'knowledge workers'. Consequently, the industry has contributed to the reproduction of this class, while also augmenting its cultural capital by creating new 'global' subjectivities and orientations. Second, the foundational myths of the industry emphasize the humble 'middle-class' origins of its entrepreneurs, and the industry's success in the global market is widely attributed to its adherence to 'middle-class values'. Accordingly, IT companies' brand-building exercises are permeated by narratives about their Indian middle-class identity and culture, which have fed back into the ideological and cultural reconstitution of this class, or more accurately, into the discursive production of a new globalized elite that claims 'middle-class' identity.

I also explore the broader political and ideological implications of these changes in middle-class identity. As Leela Fernandes has argued, the 'new Indian middle class represents the political construction of a social group that operates as a proponent of economic liberalization' (Fernandes 2006: xviii). I extend this point by showing how the software industry, and its entrepreneurs and employees, have taken the lead in the propagation of a free market-led development paradigm as well as in the fashioning of a new ideology for the middle class. With the startling success of this industry over the last two decades, several of its key organizations and figures have emerged as icons of, and spokespersons for, the liberalization agenda, and I examine their narratives for clues about the cultural and ideological refashioning of the middle class. In particular, the collapsing of the 'new middle class' into the 'new India' through the medium of the software industry has contributed to several discursive shifts in the identity of this class and its place in the nation. These changes are traced within the context of a larger transformation in middle-class politics that embraces liberalization and individualized mobility and achievement in the name of higher growth rates, while rejecting state policies aimed at social justice and the eradication of poverty.

Reproducing the middle class

The IT industry has become one of the major sites of India's integration into the global economy. Linked to the restructuring of global capitalism since the 1980s, it was established primarily as a provider of software services to companies located in the developed economies. Although some of the investment in the early days of the industry came from American multinationals setting up captive software development units in India, several Indian software services companies were also started in this period, most notably the current giants of the industry such as Infosys, Wipro and Tata Consultancy Services (TCS). The economic reforms that were initiated in India around the same time gave a major impetus to this export-oriented industry, which consequently has grown exponentially over the last decade to generate total earnings of US $39.6 billion in 2006–07, of which $31.4 billion were from exports. India now accounts for 65 per cent of the global market for offshore IT services.[2]

The software outsourcing industry was built up initially on the basis of 'bodyshopping' — providing contract services in which Indian engineers are sent 'on site' to work on projects at the customer's location (Xiang 2007). As a result, the Indian IT workforce is highly mobile and many IT professionals have worked abroad for varying periods of time. Software engineers also constitute a substantial proportion of overseas Indians (especially of the NRIs, or Non-Resident Indians, in the US), and IT has been an important element in the formation of transnational networks linking the middle class with the diaspora. More recently, with the shift to the 'offshore' model in which the majority of the outsourced work is carried out in India, there is more scope for IT employment and entrepreneurship within the country.

While the total workforce in software outsourcing may not be more than 700,000,[3] constituting a very small percentage of the professional/white-collar workforce, IT professionals carry significant social and symbolic weight in the middle-class public sphere. Images and narratives about this new category of upwardly mobile and global professionals circulate constantly in the media. Because they are very highly paid compared to other workers with a similar demographic and educational profile, they are able to pursue the consumption-oriented lifestyle of the 'new middle class'.[4] Moreover, the transnational nature of their work and frequent travel abroad provide them with substantial foreign 'exposure'. Software professionals thus represent the fulfilment of the aspirations of the transnationalized middle class (cf. Fernandes 2006: Chapter 2), and are identified in the popular imagination with the 'new India'.

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[2] NASSCOM, 'IT Industry Factsheet', www.nasscom.org (accessed 1 October 2007); see also 'Summary of NASSCOM–McKinsey Report 2005', in NASSCOM Newsline, no. 50, December 2005, www.nasscom.org (accessed 20 January 2006).

[3] According to NASSCOM estimates, the total direct employment generated by the industry came to about 1.6 million in 2006–07 (NASSCOM, 'IT Industry Factsheet', August 2007, www.nasscom.in (accessed 1 October 2007). Of these, about 550,000 are in IT services and 140,000 in engineering services and software products, totalling 690,000 in the export sector. 553,000 are in the IT-enables service–Business Process Outsourcing (ITES-BPO) sector, and the rest (378,000) are in the domestic sector or are 'in-house' IT professionals.

[4] I have written about middle-class identity and consumption among IT professionals in Upadhya (2008b).

At the structural level, the IT industry has enhanced the economic and social power of the urban middle classes by providing significant new employment opportunities. It has also provided jobs for some young people from lower middle-class, semi-urban and rural backgrounds, who have come through India's many engineering colleges to acquire the necessary qualifications to become software engineers, thereby creating a new entry point into the middle class. Although there are no comprehensive survey data available on the social composition of the IT workforce, extant studies based on small samples indicate that it comprises overwhelmingly people from educated, middle-class, upper-caste, and urban backgrounds (Upadhya and Vasavi 2006: Chapter 4; Upadhya 2007b). The parents of most software engineers belong to the 'old' middle class — they are college-educated salaried professionals, managers and technical workers employed primarily in the government and the public sector. This finding is hardly surprising, for it is primarily middle-class families who possess not only the economic means but also the social and cultural capital needed to equip their children to enter professional, managerial and technical jobs such as those offered by the IT industry. However, an important exception to this generalization is that a large proportion of software engineers comes from smaller towns rather than the metro cities, and a significant minority are from non-Brahmin middle castes and Other Backward Castes (OBCs). While the industry has thus drawn in a number of people from non-metropolitan urban areas, most of them are from the upper- and middle-caste groups and from economically well-off families, those that have historically benefited the most from the new educational opportunities. This is due to certain filtering mechanisms in the recruitment process that tend to privilege candidates from standard middle-class families. IT companies look for people who will fit into the globalized work atmosphere, and job applicants are assessed not only for intelligence and technical knowledge but also for personality, social skills, and especially the ability to communicate in English, thereby excluding those who do not have the requisite cultural capital and social skills.[5]

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[5] These filtering mechanisms are described in Upadhya (2007b).

The IT industry, however, propagates a very different picture, claiming that it has opened up significant new job opportunities for rural youth and for those from marginalized classes and lower-income groups. A prominent theme of the narratives of industry leaders and Human Resource (HR) managers is the 'rural' and lower-class origins of many software engineers. But it must be noted that HR managers, most of whom are from metros and larger cities, tend to identify anyone from small towns as 'rural'. These 'rural' youth are not necessarily from poor or lower-caste families — most of their parents are educated and employed in middle-class occupations, or else belong to the rural elite or the newly rich small business class.[6]

Although the workforce is predominantly urban middle-class in origin, there are sufficient individual cases of software engineers who come from modest or rural backgrounds to substantiate, rhetorically, the IT industry's contention that it has provided an important avenue of social and economic mobility for subaltern groups. As noted above, IT has indeed become an alternative route of entry into the middle class for some youth from the category of the rural rich and the lower middle classes. But because it requires employees with a certain kind of cultural capital that is available primarily in the middle class, it is not as 'open' as it claims to be. Nonetheless, the propagation of the ideal of individual merit-based achievement is central to its ideological positioning.[7]

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[6] The spread of private engineering colleges, especially in south India, has allowed the children of large and medium farmers to pursue strategies of upward mobility by obtaining engineering degrees, a trend seen especially in Andhra Pradesh. In their quest for more manpower, IT companies now recruit from such lower-ranked colleges rather than only from the top engineering institutes, so that at least the lower-level jobs are attainable for a broader cross-section of the educated youth. The profile of the IT workforce thus reflects a wider pattern of expansion and heterogenization of the middle class, especially in Tier Two and Tier Three towns across India, linked to economic growth, agricultural prosperity in some regions and the expansion of educational opportunities.

[7] This discussion points to some of the difficulties that we encounter in understanding the contemporary middle class: while there is a normative ideal of the'middle class' based on its earlier shape, forged in the Nehruvian era — the English-educated, city-dwelling service class — the extension and expansion of this class over the last two decades has meant that the

Globalizing the middle class

Satish Deshpande proposes that the 'middle class is the class that is most dependent on *cultural capital* and on the mechanisms for the reproduction of such capital' (Deshpande 2003: 140). In the previous section I argued that the IT industry has been established largely on the basis of the accumulated cultural capital of the middle class, which has produced its army of 'knowledge workers'. But the industry is not only contributing to the reproduction of the middle class, it is also helping to reconstitute this class by contributing to the formation of a new kind of cultural capital. Although software companies attempt to recruit people with the appropriate social skills, still many young software engineers are not fully equipped to function in the global workplace. Hence, they design training programmes to mould them into the right shape by inculcating appropriate cultural styles and 'global' orientations and dispositions (Upadhya 2008a). The transformation of these middle-class professionals into a new category of global worker–consumer subjects is indicated by their work narratives about personal growth, greater 'awareness' and the benefits of international 'exposure' (Upadhya 2008b). There is no space to elaborate on this process or on its implications for the subjectivities of these workers; here I only touch upon two of the ways in which IT is reshaping middle-class identity and culture.

First, software professionals' experience of working in a global workplace, where they are surrounded by narratives about cultural identity and difference, feed into a larger process of the production and articulation of a 'global Indian' identity within the new middle class. Indian software engineers are in frequent contact with customers, colleagues, or managers located abroad, and software companies attempt to teach them to communicate and interact in an appropriate way by subjecting them to a range of

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requisite skills to work in IT are found in a wider cross-section of society. The entry of a number of workers from small towns has created an image of 'diversity', but only when juxtaposed to the normative 'middle class'. The figures of the Telugu-speaking software engineer from a Guntur village or the Tamil OBC techie from Coimbatore underscore this change and allow the industry to represent itself as inclusive.

'soft skills' training programmes, such as in cultural sensitivity and communication skills. These programmes, together with practices of 'cross-cultural management' that are commonly employed in such multi-cultural work environments, invoke specific ideas about Indian culture and cultural difference, in the process changing the meaning of 'Indian' for these workers (Upadhya 2008a).

The production of this category of global Indian professionals is also feeding into a wider discursive move within the new middle class in which nationalism is being reconstituted within the discourse of globalization, creating a kind of global nationalism. The success of the software industry has imparted a more positive image to India, and the middle classes take credit for much of India's transformation and recent economic boom. Many of the software professionals we[8] interviewed voiced a nationalist pride in the IT industry, India's consequent prominent place in the global economy, and their role in making IT a success.[9] Moreover, unlike the earlier generation of NRIs who had to live abroad in order to succeed, the new global professional can live and work in India, yet earn a salary and lead a lifestyle similar to that available in the US. Most software professionals expressed a strong desire to remain in India, or to return permanently after working abroad for a few years. Their narratives highlighted the differences between them and their parents' generation (the old middle class), representing themselves as more aware, open-minded, liberal, and cosmopolitan. They asserted that working in the IT industry had given them a wider 'exposure' to the outside world and made them more tolerant and confident (cf. Fuller and Narasimhan 2006). Although many software professionals see themselves as substantially different from their parents, their 'global' identity is at the same time reinforcing their Indian roots, producing a hybrid Indian identity that allows the 'global' to be articulated through the category of the nation (cf. Mazzarella 2003).

A second way in which the IT industry is transforming middle-class culture is through the new culture of work that has been introduced, which provides employees with new social, personal and cultural skills and dispositions. Not only are they expected to become more 'professional' in demeanour and dress, software professionals are supposed to transform themselves into the individualized, autonomous 'entrepreneurial' workers (Beck 2000a; Sennett 1998) of the 'new workplace', a model that is promoted by contemporary management ideology in the West and one that has been adopted by most software companies operating in India.[10] This management model privileges more open, 'flat' and flexible organizational structures and so requires employees who are self-managed and self-motivated. Software companies employ a range of soft skills training programmes — such as time management, self-actualization, personality development, assertiveness training and emotional intelligence — and other management techniques to produce 'empowered' workers. Such training, and the experience of 'global knowledge work' itself, inflect IT professionals' subjectivities and alter their orientation towards work, the self and others. Many software engineers spoke about the personal transformations they had undergone (willingly or otherwise), for instance, that they had become more organized, time-conscious, methodical, and self-motivated. Training in time management and other such organizational skills usually extends much beyond the workplace to include advice on life planning, work–life balance, personality development, and the like. These training programmes adopt a range of Western psychological concepts and techniques, or 'technologies of the self', to inculcate desirable personality traits such as 'assertiveness' and 'self-confidence' (Sathaye 2008). Without exploring here more deeply whether these psychological and social orientations are really internalized by the subjects, their narratives do suggest that many accept and valorize the notions of autonomy, self-control and self-actualization that are learned at the workplace, and thereby accept the new regime of individualized flexible labour that has been ushered in by the IT industry. These psychological reorientations resonate with the liberal ideology of the new middle class that stresses individual achievement, self-fulfilment and upward mobility.

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[8] These interviews were carried out under the NIAS-IDPAD project on IT professionals in Bangalore and Europe (see Upadhya and Vasavi 2006).

[9] The study of IT professionals in Chennai by Fuller and Narasimhan (2007) presents similar findings.

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[10] There is a burgeoning literature on the 'new workplace' in the West, a topic that has barely been studied in the context of globalizing economies such as India. See, for example, McKinlay and Starkey (1998); Ray and Sayer (1999); and Thompson and Warhurst (1998). The new cultures of work and the deployment of a range of soft-skills training programmes in the Indian software industry are described in Sathaye (2008) and Upadhya (2008a).

Middle-class entrepreneurs

> Infosys shows that it is possible for middle-class people with no family heritage of being in business to build a lot of wealth from scratch in one generation . . . It is creating opportunities for people who thought the only way to get ahead was to migrate to the United States.[11]

The imbrication of the IT industry in the middle class extends much beyond the opportunities for lucrative employment and personal transformation that it provides, for it has also enabled a small segment of upwardly mobile professionals to become business entrepreneurs — some of them very successful ones — thereby helping to transform the self-image of the middle class and its imagined relationship to the globalizing economy.

Although the industry continues to be dominated by the few large companies that were started in the 1980s such as Wipro and Infosys, a large number of small- and medium-sized firms sprang up during the 1990s in cities such as Bangalore, as many ambitious 'techies' left their jobs and started their own companies, especially during the 'dot com' boom of 1999–2000. When Infosys became the first Indian company to be listed on the Nasdaq (or on any foreign stock exchange) in 1999, it created a euphoria for technology stocks, driving up prices and greatly increasing the market capitalization of other IT companies (Rajghatta 2001: 311). The media hype surrounding Indian entrepreneurs (both in India and the US), such as Azim Premji and Sabir Bhatia who became multi-millionaires during the IT boom, also contributed to the start-up mania. Although many of these start-ups folded after the dot com bust and '9/11', a large number of small software companies continue to thrive in India, especially in Bangalore.

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[11] Nandan Nilekani quoted in Celia Dugger, 'India's High-tech, and Sheepish, Capitalism', *The New York Times on the Web*, 16 December 1999, http://www.nytimes.com/library/world/asia/121699india-capitalism.html (accessed 30 November 2003).

A small survey of small- and medium-sized software companies in Bangalore that I carried out during 2002–03 (Upadhya 2003, 2004a) revealed that in almost all cases their founders were from the middle class — they were highly educated professionals with long work experience in the industry — and that few came from the traditional business communities or had tapped 'old economy' capital to start their businesses.[12] Most of these entrepreneurs said that, given their middle-class origins, they could never have imagined they would run their own businesses. For the Nehruvian middle class, leaving a secure job to start a business is a gamble that is generally frowned upon. The fact that a substantial proportion of the old middle class was Brahmin adds to the antipathy towards business entrepreneurship, which earlier was largely confined to the 'traditional' trading or merchant communities and established business families. The economic base of the middle class and upper castes was in 'service' (white-collar employment), especially in the public sector and the government, while '*banias*' were engaged in the dirty work of doing business. But the IT boom, which initiated India's 'knowledge economy', provided the opportunity for them to make this leap into business entrepreneurship. This shift in attitudes towards business is noted by Gurcharan Das, who cites it as an important element of the 'quiet social and economic revolution' (Das 2002b: ix) that India is undergoing. 'Indians have not traditionally accorded a high place to the making of money', indicated by the low rank of Vaisyas in the *varna* system. But the entrepreneurial spirit is spreading across India: 'Since the economic reforms making money has become increasingly respectable and sons of Brahmins and Ksatriyas are getting MBA's [*sic*] and want to become entrepreneurs' (ibid.: xiii). This is one reason why the IT industry has come to symbolize the opportunities provided by the liberalized economy; these middle-class software entrepreneurs represent a significant departure from the cultural orientation of the old middle class, showing what can be achieved when the 'permit licence raj' is dismantled and the educated class is allowed to enter the economic arena. The statement by Infosys Chairman

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[12] The class of IT entrepreneurs is also highly transnational: not only are there many Indians who have started IT companies in the US, transnational connections of various kinds have also been essential for the success of India-based companies (Upadhya 2004a).

Nandan Nilekani quoted above was echoed by several software entrepreneurs I interviewed. One said, 'The IT industry is the great hope of the middle classes'.

Linked to these developments, a key feature of the software industry is its entrepreneurial ethos: terms such as 'growth-oriented', 'youth-dominated' and 'ambitious' are often used by people in the industry to describe it. Stories about the success of IT entrepreneurs circulate widely in the IT social field and provide inspiration to the many software engineers who nurture dreams of striking out on their own. The passion for entrepreneurship has been stimulated by the success stories of companies such as Infosys as well as NRI tech entrepreneurs such as Vinod Khosla and Kanwal Rekhi, who are role models for aspiring software engineers, symbolizing what Indians can achieve as entrepreneurs if the economy is freed by liberalization. Gurcharan Das (a key proselytizer of liberalization), in his writings, continually lauds the software industry for its entrepreneurial spirit, ability to accumulate wealth, and the numerous rags-to-riches stories of Indian start-up companies that made it big: 'These entrepreneurial miracles are part of a new social contract for post-reform India. The new millionaires did not inherit wealth. They have risen on the back of their talent, hard work, and professional skills' (Das 2002b: xv–xvi). The strong belief in the benefits of free enterprise and entrepreneurial endeavour that pervades the industry is also linked to its representation as a product of globalization and liberalization.[13]

A middle-class industry? Self-representation and marketing

The software industry has its base in the middle class, and this location has formed the basis for its self-identity and corporate image-making exercises. This theme is exemplified in company foundation stories, such as the well-known one about N. R. Narayana Murthy (co-founder and former chairman of Infosys Technologies). His rise to great fame and wealth as leader of one of the most successful IT companies forms an essential component of the organization's consciously crafted publicity strategy. As the often-told Indian 'Horatio Alger' story goes, Narayana Murthy, the son of a 'poor schoolteacher', was 'born in the dusty village of Siddlaghatta in Kolar district, one of eight children. The early days were a struggle, he recalls, as the eight siblings had to share resources. "But we learnt to share and enjoy the little we had," he says' (Rajghatta 2001: 301–2).

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[13] Contrary to its popular representation as an industry that was able to grow because of *non-interference* by the state, the IT industry has benefited from significant state support, direct and indirect, right from its inception. A range of policies, including 10-year tax holidays, duty-free import of equipment, provision of free or subsidized infrastructure and land, and the establishment of software technology parks (STPs), have been instrumental in promoting the growth of the industry (Balakrishnan 2006; Parthasarathy 2005).

Although Murthy had secured admission in the prestigious Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), the story goes, he had to attend the local government engineering college because his family could not afford the fees, a disappointment that made him even more determined to succeed on his own. He followed this with a postgraduate degree from IIT Kanpur and then worked for several years abroad and in India. In 1981, Murthy and six others left their jobs to found Infosys in their apartment in Pune, with ₹ 10,000 of capital: 'For three years, the couple lived in a small one-room house with no servants, no luxuries and lots of hard work' (Rajghatta 2001: 305). Infosys struggled along until it was freed of bureaucratic constraints by the advent of liberalization in 1991, after which its fortunes rose. The company went public in 1993, and its subsequent listing on the Nasdaq bolstered the image of the Indian software industry and put it on the map of the global economy.

Despite his company's stunning success and his own enormous personal wealth, in media reports Narayana Murthy is always represented as adhering to a modest 'middle-class' lifestyle. This simplicity, and his grounding in 'middle-class values', is the secret of his success, according to the media hype:

> The slight, bespectacled computer engineer who starts each day by cleaning the toilet in his family's small, spartan house hardly seems to be the new archetype of a wildly successful Indian entrepreneur, boldly steering his country away from decades of state-dominated, bureaucratic socialism and into a new era of capitalist growth. But in India, where a long line of Hindu ascetics has captured the popular imagination . . . it is fitting that one of the country's most influential champions of

> capitalism and hottest software tycoons should be a man who lives as if he were a humble civil servant.[14]

His own narratives about his career and success extol 'traditional middle-class values' as the key to economic prosperity, and emphasize that the accumulation of wealth is not for personal gain but for the larger good of society. Murthy believes in spreading wealth around; for instance, Infosys was one of the first companies in India to introduce employee stock options, which made many Infosys employees wealthy — a fact that is frequently reiterated in media accounts. Infosys and its founders also support a range of charitable activities, including the Infosys Foundation.

The iconization of Narayana Murthy within the IT community and beyond is probably unparalleled in the history of Indian industry (he has perhaps been rivalled in recent years in popularity ratings among MBA students only by Dhirubhai Ambani). He is seen not just as a business leader but as a potential national leader, who would be able to lead India into its rightful place in the world order by making it globally competitive while preserving its essential moral fibre. His symbolic power, I suggest, comes precisely from his successful retailing of a middle-class image, through which his personal fortune and elite status are successfully effaced. The Narayana Murthy story appeals to the aspiring middle classes because it demonstrates that it is possible to be successful in business and accumulate wealth while retaining the cultural identity that gives the middle class its ideological power. Murthy embodies the continuation of the 'old middle-class' values of austerity, service to the nation and self-sacrifice, played out within the new ideology of the market. In these narratives, 'middle class' signifies not privilege and dominance but modest economic standing, hard work, and commitment to national-development goals. By elaborating stories of struggle, especially to overcome the obstacles to entrepreneurship posed by the socialist state, the advantages of a liberalized economy are thrown into sharp relief. These narratives and media images are central to the construction of the dominant ideology of the new middle class and the legitimization of its position.[15]

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[14] Celia Duggar, 'India's High-Tech, and Sheepish, Capitalism', *The New York Times* on the web, 16 December 1999, http://www.nytimes.com/library/world/asia/121699india-capitalism.html (accessed 30 November 2003).

The Murthy icon also embodies the collapsing of the nation into the new middle class: his constant refrain is that capitalism and the accumulation of wealth, rather than socialism, are what will eradicate poverty and make India a global power, this being the justification for his entrepreneurial activities as well as his support for liberalization. He does not hesitate to draw a parallel between his devotion to Infosys and the sacrifice of nationalist leaders (the title of Rajghatta's (2001) chapter on Murthy is apposite — 'The Middle Class Mahatma'). In a recent interview, responding to a question about balancing work with family, he said:

> I don't strike a balance. Infosys comes first. If India has to fully redeem on her promise, a few generations of leaders have to put the interests of the country ahead of their personal interest . . . you have to work 24 hours a day to make our grandchildren and great grandchildren's lives better. Kasturba Gandhi was an extraordinary lady; she gave her husband for the sake of the nation . . . It must be bitter for Gandhi's children . . . But the suffering that his family went through gave us . . . freedom. Leaders must be ready to sacrifice their personal lives and the family must be ready to undergo that hardship.[16]

The identification of the IT industry with the middle class also forms the basis of the marketing strategy of several companies. Catering as they do to Western customers who demand not just quality, on-time, value-for-money work, but also confidentiality, transparency and honesty, Indian IT firms have tried to sell themselves on the basis of their ethical standards and cultural values as much as their technical expertise and the labour-cost differential. They seek to distinguish themselves from 'traditional Indian business', which is commonly represented as corrupt and inefficient, by highlighting their 'traditional middle-class values' such as honesty, frugality and social service. In their public statements of 'Mission, Vision and Values', most software organizations emphasize their clean business practices, sound corporate governance and high ethical standards. 'The rules of the game are different in international business', one informant said: 'To get and keep customers you need to demonstrate a high level of professionalism and competence' as well as integrity.

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[15] The significance of Murthy as an icon for the new middle class is underlined by the contrast between him and Azim Premji, the founder of Wipro. Premji is a respected entrepreneur and one of India's wealthiest men, but he does not command the same symbolic power as Murthy. Although it also has a 'professional' and 'global' image, Wipro grew out of an old-economy company and is still primarily family-owned; hence Premji, in many ways, represents the traditional Indian business class.

[16] Interview with Narayana Murthy, *Economic Times*, Bangalore, 25 October 2007, p. 5.

This marketing strategy draws on a wider discourse that runs through the narratives of both industry leaders and employees about the differences between the IT sector and the 'old economy' in their cultures and ways of doing business. The IT industry and the people who work in it are represented as more 'professional', ethical and global in outlook, in contrast to the corrupt, hide-bound and venal traditional Indian business class and the hierarchical, or even feudal, nature of their organizations, which stems from having roots in traditional family businesses. An important element in this discourse is the claim that software companies uphold the principles of merit and individual achievement, in contrast to the nepotism and use of 'connections' in traditional companies. The head of an executive search firm said that she liked the IT industry because it was 'clean, direct, fast-moving, and performance based'. Or as Rajghatta in his hagiographic account of Narayana Murthy put it:

> Infosys' greatest contribution was to bring about a sense of decency, transparency, and public commitment to business practices in India . . . It also burnished the Indian corporate image with its unorthodox and selfless ways while at the same time showing handsome growth quarter after quarter . . . Infosys' guiding principle . . . was to put public good ahead of private good. It would lead to better private good. (Rajghatta 2001: 317–18)

The idea that the IT industry has ushered in a new, more enlightened work culture, displacing the corrupt and inefficient management practices of the old economy, thus provides yet another set of images in the formulation of the 'global India' discourse.

The IT industry's self-representation as a 'middle-class' industry has placed it, ideologically, at the centre of the liberalization agenda. During the earlier period of Nehruvian socialism, the argument goes, the middle class did not enter into business entrepreneurship due to rampant nepotism, corruption and endless bureaucratic controls (e.g., see Das 2002a, 2002b). But with the advent of IT, the same middle class has been able to display its entrepreneurial and innovative talents and to build a new clean, 'professional', global, and knowledge-based business in which success depends on hard work and intelligence rather than political connections or social networks.

Brahmins and software

In these representations of IT as a middle-class industry, a running subtext points to the Brahmin origins of many of its entrepreneurs. In their narratives, foundational values are attributed not only to the middle class but also to Indian cultural traditions. A senior manager of a major software company said: 'Some values like fairness and integrity are truly Indian in nature. Purity of behaviour is also high on Indian ideals and I feel it is part of Indian culture'. To illustrate what he meant by 'purity of behaviour', he referred to Rama's actions in the *Ramayana*. The conflation of corporate ethics, middle-class identity and Indian religiosity in the self-representations of these companies indicates how closely these diverse discourses are imbricated in one another, as also the Brahminical orientation of the industry.[17]

This point is underlined by the frequently heard narrative about the special suitability and talent of Indians for computers and software. IT is represented as a 'knowledge industry' in which India is well-positioned to succeed, due not only to the availability of an army of potential 'knowledge workers', but also the special cultural suitability of Indians to intellectual labour. Media reports and hagiographic accounts of the rise of the IT industry often refer to the high level of development in mathematics and astronomy in ancient India as proof of Indians' special skills in maths and logic:

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[17] The role of transnational Hindu religious movements in the constitution of the new business class is illustrated in Fuller and Harriss (2005). The rising popularity of packaged spirituality practices, such as the courses offered by Sri Sri Ravi Shankar's Art of Living, among upwardly mobile professionals, business leaders and the corporate sector as a whole is a significant post-liberalization phenomenon that demands further analysis.

> Brahmins have had thousands of years of experience in dealing with abstract philosophical and spiritual concepts of the Upanishads. This may explain why Indians are especially good at mathematics and theoretical physics . . . Indians invented the zero. The information age thus plays to our strength. After all, cyberspace, like spiritual space, is invisible. Our core competence may well be invisible. (Das 2002b: 153)

In this passage, Gurcharan Das goes on to write that it is not surprising that a large proportion of IT entrepreneurs are Brahmins rather than from the traditional merchant communities. According to Nandan Nilekani, the ancient Indian tradition of philosophical enquiry 'gives us a good comfort level with conceptual things like software' (Rajghatta 2001: 5). The connection between India's ancient traditions in science and mathematics and its current success in IT is also retailed by the American media: 'If you can hack it in Sanskrit, what's the big deal with Java?', asks Robert Cringely rhetorically in an article on Bangalore (quoted in ibid.). This discourse about Indians' talent for IT reflects the Brahminical origins of many of the industry's leaders and employees (despite vociferous denials, see Upadhya 2007b), for the discourse conflates all Indians with Brahmins. Thus, although the dominant discourse in the IT industry revolves around the identity and culture of the middle *class*, the subtext of *caste* surfaces at various junctures, for instance, in the debate about reservations and in the ideology of merit.

The ideology of merit

> The new millionaires did not inherit wealth. They have risen on the back of their talent, hard work, and professional skills. (Das 2002b: xv–xvi)

The trope of 'merit' is a central plank of the ideology of the new middle class, and the narratives of personal achievement and middle-class entrepreneurship, discussed in the foregoing sections, serve to underwrite this. The ideology of merit holds that success in business or career is, or should be, purely a matter of individual talent, effort and hard work. The 'professional' IT industry, it is claimed, upholds these values, in contrast to the public sector and old-economy companies where connections, bribes and other such strategies can garner jobs or promotions. This discourse also claims that merit-based recruitment is one of the factors responsible for the IT industry's success, allowing it to create substantial new employment opportunities for rural youth, socially and economically disadvantaged groups, as well as for women. This claim is substantiated by the circulation of stories of rapid upward mobility, such as that of Narayana Murthy.

In accordance with the ideology of merit, most industry leaders are strongly opposed to job reservations or affirmative action programmes of any kind, at least on the basis of caste. The industry's argument is that it needs to be free to hire the 'best' in order to remain competitive. The notion of fairness is also invoked to support this position, for caste-based reservations are said to contravene the principle of equality of opportunity. Several IT industry leaders were at the forefront of the opposition to the recently revived proposal for reservations in the private sector as well as the new policy of reservations for OBCs in institutions of higher education such as the IITs.[18] This opposition is also linked to the broader ideology of liberalization: the IT industry consistently resists any kind of government 'interference' in their operations, such as the enforcement of labour laws, arguing instead for voluntary policies of corporate self-governance.

Resistance to reservations and the ideology of merit permeate the middle classes in general, providing a narrative of self-justification and legitimization, as the anti-Mandal agitation showed. The deep embedding of this position is suggested by the fact that at the height of the anti-reservation agitation in 2006, a number of IT professionals came out on the road near Electronic City (the campus that houses Infosys as well as several other software companies) in Bangalore to protest against it, although they were not among those who would be directly threatened by the proposed new reservations. These protests extended even to Indian students and professionals in the US, where anti-reservation demonstrations were organized in the Bay Area in June 2006 under the banner of 'Indians for Equality'.[19] The liberal argument that was made by many of these protestors was that positive discrimination on the basis of 'class' or economic status might be acceptable, but not on the basis of caste, ignoring thereby the fact that this approach would only serve to reinforce the congruence of caste and class status. After all, 'poor Brahmins' like Narayana Murthy would benefit from reservations based on economic criteria, whereas reservations for OBCs and SC/STs (Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes) pose a major threat to their dominant position.

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[18] The industry's position on these questions is based in part on its growing requirement for large numbers of highly educated and 'learnable' young people. It is concerned about expanding the pool of qualified potential employees (NASSCOM 2004), and proposals for new reservations, they argue, would lead to the admission of many 'unmeritorious' students to premier institutions, further shrinking the available pool. Industry leaders contend that mechanisms other than reservations (especially, improving the quality of primary education) should be found to enhance the competitiveness of OBC and other lower-caste students so that they can gain entry to premier institutions and good jobs on their own merit.

The 'merit' argument is based on a very partial conception of inequality in Indian society, in which caste is denied but class is in some sense valorized (albeit as a form of social differentiation that is open). As the foregoing discussion indicates, 'middle class' is a salient identity for most IT professionals and business leaders and for many others; it connotes not just a particular socio-economic status but also a specific set of social and cultural values and orientations. The fashioning of a particular image of the middle class by the media in the post-liberalization period has made its consumer-oriented and globalized lifestyle the focus of aspirations for many, while notions of openness and individual achievement allow those who are already well off to believe that middle-class status can be acquired and is not just inherited. After all, one of the major consequences of liberalization is supposed to have been the enormous expansion in the size of the middle class (defined as those with a certain level of purchasing power), and caste and other ascriptive social identities are regarded as irrelevant to this quest. Faith in the possibility of individualized economic mobility underwrites the IT industry's claims about its inclusiveness and its support for the anti-reservation argument. It also allows the industry to dismiss evidence of continuing upper-caste monopoly over higher education and private-sector jobs (see Deshpande 2006a; Deshpande and Yadav 2006; Mohanty 2006); caste inequality is attributed to other social and economic inequalities, which are to be overcome through better education, economic growth and more employment, rather than through positive discrimination policies.

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[19] See http://www.youth4equality.org/aspx/pastevents.aspx (accessed 2 February 2007) and http://www.tribuneindia.com/2006/20060606/world.htm (accessed 2 February 2007).

Conclusion: The 'new' middle class and the 'new India'

In this essay I have explored several strands of the relationship between the IT industry and the production, reproduction and reconstitution of the Indian middle classes. At one level, the industry draws on India's large educated, English-speaking workforce and its cultural capital for its primary resource — 'knowledge professionals' — and by hiring mainly urban middle-class youth, is helping this class to reproduce itself. But the existing cultural capital of the middle class is not entirely sufficient for a global industry, hence the IT industry works at outfitting its professionals to function in the global economy by providing them with new dispositions and orientations, thereby feeding back into the cultural transformation of the middle class. While the Indian middle class has been 'internationalizing' (Uberoi 1998) since at least the 1980s, the growth of the IT industry has given a strong impetus to this process. The conjuncture of the industry's social location in the middle class and its transnational character has provided the basis for the construction of a 'global Indian' identity both at the individual and the corporate level. The rise of the IT industry also symbolizes the relocation of the middle class from the public to the private sector. The private sector offers better salaries and perks, opportunities for foreign travel and enhanced social prestige. Further, the 'new economy' of information and communication technology, services, banking, and financial industries is seen as driving India's current growth spurt. The new middle class thus embodies the image of liberalizing and globalizing India that is so widely circulated in the international media (e.g., Friedman 2005).

Another way in which the IT industry has been significant in the construction of the new middle class is through its representation as a product of middle-class values and enterprise. Liberalization is supposed to have freed the natural entrepreneurial energies of the Indian people so that they can create their own wealth as well as wealth for the nation. This represents a reworking of middle-class ideology from one where 'culture' is no longer subsumed by 'economy' and 'economy' by the 'state', as in the Nehruvian paradigm (Deshpande 2003), to one where the economy is freed from state control, wealth is created by becoming global, and 'traditional' Indian culture is reaffirmed in the form of spirituality and 'middle-class values'. The IT industry is of course but one force behind the production of a new middle-class culture that embraces entrepreneurial and market values and consumerism. Also, as I have shown, the new middle class continues to draw on the symbolic capital of the old middle class by espousing 'traditional' values of family, austerity and simplicity.

The claim that the IT industry is a middle-class enterprise and hence is more ethical, principled and socially responsible than traditional Indian business has enabled the middle class to embed itself in the growing national economy in a new way, especially through entrepreneurship for development. In public discourses, the new generation of business leaders symbolize a new wave in the Indian economy and in the conduct of business. Because it is a knowledge-based global industry that does not have significant roots in the 'old economy',[20] software is seen as different — more open, professional and ethical — and not dependent on the protectionist policies of the past. In line with this image, IT industry leaders publicly advocate an open economy, reduced government controls, free movement of labour and capital, and other measures of liberalization. The ideological leadership of the software industry has allowed it, and its representatives, to identify itself with 'resurgent India', and hence to influence the country's developmental agenda in certain directions. Moreover, the leading intellectuals of the new middle class have been able to frame the terms of discourse about India's development, shutting out much of what is happening in the 'other' India (such as the agrarian crisis, struggles over land acquisition, or violent state repression of resistance movements around the country). India is consistently represented as surging ahead, with many problems still to be overcome but essentially on the right track. These representations substantially reflect the views of the new middle class (who are also the new economic/political elites) and the new corporates, while other voices and perspectives are largely silenced.

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[20] Among the largest software organizations, only Wipro and TCS (Tata Consultancy Services) grew out of established 'old-economy' companies.

The ideological centrality of the software industry has been built on several fronts. First, through its icons, such as Narayana Murthy, the industry has garnered immense symbolic power for the aspiring middle classes, especially the youth. Second, the substantial earning power, social respectability and visibility of software engineers as a new category of global professionals have made IT the career of choice for many youth.[21] The constant media focus on the industry's requirement for large numbers of IT professionals, and the circulation of stories about rapid upward mobility and journeys from the village to New York, have created a widespread impression that anyone can be successful in this industry, given enough intelligence and hard work. The increasing ideological domination of the professional, internationalized middle class is also based on the common notion that it, together with globalized industries such as software outsourcing, will be the vanguard of India's development in the 21st century. The IT industry has thus become emblematic of the 'new India' and its advent on the global stage as a potential world superpower, and India's success in this field has placed it at the centre of current neo-liberal discourses about globalization. To the extent that the middle class claims credit for India's economic revival and newfound international visibility, the people who founded this 'knowledge industry', as well as those who work in it, occupy a central place in the imaginaries of the middle class about themselves and their place in the nation. Moreover, the software industry has played an important role in the construction of the new middle class as a cultural/ideological formation that carries significant weight in the reconstitution of the nation and in the politics of the 'new India'.

Consequently, the IT industry and its leaders have had a disproportionate impact on public policy and urban public culture. For instance, the boundless enthusiasm for computerization and information technology that is displayed by many industry and political leaders in India today (or the 'culture of magical belief' that surrounds information technology, for which see van der Veer 2005), who see it as a catalyst for economic growth and a short cut to social development, is closely linked to the IT industry's successes and the image it has created of itself. This discourse represents nothing less than a new development paradigm centred on the idea that India can, through technological prowess, 'leapfrog' over the usual stages of development to become a 'knowledge economy'. As Kanwal Rekhi put it, 'The balance of power is shifting from labour intensive to intellectual intensive. In twenty years, India will be unrecognizable. It will thrive in the age of the knowledge worker' (Rajghatta 2001: 23).

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[21] The social status of this profession is underscored by the high dowry rates that software engineers command, now exceeding those for IAS officers (Xiang 2007).

The notion that the IT industry represents what the middle class can achieve if given the freedom to strive, glosses over the fact that the industry remains closely tied to pre-existing structures of class and caste. Drawing on the cultural capital of the 'old middle class', it is reproducing these structures and reinforcing their hegemony. As Fernandes (2006) argues, the 'new middle class' is not really new, but is a new representation of the middle class as leader of the nation — the new India — under conditions of globalization. The celebratory narratives about IT that continually circulate may thus be understood as strategies employed by the globalizing 'new middle classes' to assert and consolidate their hegemony in the era of liberalization, strategies which have enabled them to push India's developmental agenda in certain directions. It is little wonder, then, that policy initiatives to provide a measure of social justice and equality to the many who are excluded from this class are strongly opposed by those who belong to it, and that such opposition is premised on the principles of individual achievement, 'merit', equal opportunity, and the denial of caste-based inequalities.

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was conducted in collaboration with Peter van der Veer of the University of Utrecht. For a comprehensive report on the study's findings, see Upadhya and Vasavi (2006), available on the NIAS website (www.nias.iisc.in). The essay also draws on my earlier work on IT entrepreneurs in Bangalore (Upadhya 2003, 2004a, 2004b). I thank the participants in the IEG Workshop on 'The Middle Classes in India: Identity, Citizenship and the Public Sphere' for their comments, and A. R. Vasavi for comments on a later draft. The usual caveats apply.

8

Gender, the IT Revolution and the Making of a Middle-class India

Smitha Radhakrishnan

In the offices of a large American multinational technology corporation just outside Bangalore, I spoke to Meena, a 30-year-old engineer, about her experiences in working as a part of India's booming information technology (IT) industry. Her narrative offers a vivid portrait of how professional IT women enact a progressive Indian femininity at their workplaces:

> We like shocking the Americans who come over. We just declare a sari day, and you have all these Indian girls walking around with open *palloo*s![1] You should see the open mouths! And you see all these bright colours — red, yellow, green, and all these lovely girls with their eyes made up. And in India, it's allowed. You can come to work that way on a sari day. And we do it purposely. We do it just to shock them [laughing] . . . They just love the 'Indianness', you know? . . . I've had a lot of colleagues from the US say, 'There's such a nice blend here. You don't have these too-aggressive women, but at the same time, these women are serious about their careers. But they also know how to look like women'. I think Indian women are very good at that.

[But what if women decide not to be Indian? Not to worry about culture so much?]

> That would be something like [giggling] what was that called? Feminism or something? Something burning? We would go back to that! . . . I think you just need to look like a woman and dress like a woman and talk like a woman. It's okay. When it comes to the job, just be professional about it . . . You just do what you have to do, you enjoy the money you make, enjoy the exposure, and go home on time.

Meena's words illustrate an instance in which professional IT women self-consciously articulate the meaning of Indian womanhood, and implicitly, Indianness itself, through interactions with their American colleagues. In her account, the seemingly conflicting expectations of the IT workplace and Indian femininity are easily resolved in the saucy competency of professional women, who can sport a sexy sari while typing code, and still go home on time to care for their kids. Bright colours and open palloos mark cultural distinction amongst the cubicles of an American multinational, even as sari-clad women working diligently in front of computer screens mark the integration of such difference into the global knowledge economy. However, Meena's interpretation of the meaning of the event suggests that there is more at play here than the 'shock' value of the particular aesthetics and sensuality of Indian femininity for American colleagues, as she emphasizes in the initial part of her account. As Meena concludes, Indian women are gifted in their ability to perform their jobs competently, derive excitement and enrichment from that work, and (wisely) turn their attention to home at the end of the day. These conclusions suggest that events like 'sari day' highlight the performance of a particular kind of idealized 'Indian' femininity in the IT workplace — a femininity that reflects the back-and-forth cultural processes that women experience and navigate, from home to work and back again. In this ideal prototype of respectable femininity, any cultural tensions or uncertainties are shuttled into an unproblematic icon of feminine professionalism.

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[1] The decorative part of the sari that hangs over the shoulder.

The confident icon of Indian professional femininity that Meena describes is emblematic of the complex cultural processes that emerge from new kinds of high-end service work, which have come to provide more and more attractive employment options for middle-class women in urban India. Indeed, IT workplaces like Meena's provide a critical space for examining the production of a particular kind of 'new middle-class' culture. Although IT remains a male-dominated industry, increasing numbers of women and the high status accorded these women both inside and outside the workplace have made them key mediators of this new cultural formation in India. Arising both from the ideologies that circulate in the upper echelons of the global economy as well as from refigured notions of Indian cultural specificity and uniqueness, new forms of respectable femininity, as depicted in instances of 'sari day', serve as important enactments of 'new middle-class' culture. This culture, produced in part in the IT workplace, has become hegemonic in contemporary India. IT professionals actively participate in the production of an elite work culture that reinterprets the norms and expectations of corporate America in a distinctively and self-consciously 'Indian' idiom, giving rise to a set of values that spill over to influence the everyday lives of IT professionals, and India's 'new middle class' more broadly. This newly constituted class culture merges an ethic of professionalism and merit-based advancement with culturally specific discourses of respectable femininity and 'Indian' family values. A gendered look at the interactions between the IT workplace and the everyday lives of IT professionals, then, promises important insights into the dynamics of a new hegemonic culture in the making, a culture that claims to symbolize a 'new' India with global status.

Central to the question of 'new middle-class' culture among IT professionals is the easy elision of their eliteness. Even by the most generous estimates, there are approximately 2 million IT professionals in India, a mere 0.4 per cent of India's workforce of 480 million.[2] Furthermore, NASSCOM's official definition of IT includes a range of mid-to-high-end service positions, ranging from routine coding to high-level management, with a diverse range of incomes and consumer lifestyles. Yet, the vast majority of the 90 IT professionals I interviewed through the course of my research claimed that they were 'middle-class', a classification that ultimately serves to conceal not only the vast disparities in the everyday professional and personal lives among IT professionals, but also the difference in status between most IT professionals and most Indians. What are the cultural processes that allow IT professionals to unproblematically and almost universally claim middle-class status? To even begin to unravel the complexities of this question, it is critical to recognize that middle-class status is claimed in part through a set of constantly changing cultural and ideological qualifications that very purposefully seek distinction from non-hegemonic groups even as they assert their own ordinariness. As an ideological category, then, it is important to note that middle-class status is enacted through gender.

This essay addresses two interrelated sets of issues by examining the culture of IT work and its influence in shaping a larger 'new middle-class' culture in contemporary urban India. I aim to uncover the ways in which gender mediates the symbolic position of IT professionals on a larger Indian class landscape. Thus, this essay first seeks to highlight the prominent ways in which respectable femininity is reinforced at the IT workplace, even as it is reworked and reinvented, to produce a new kind of middle-class ethos that is self-consciously both 'global' and 'Indian'. I also suggest that the ways in which these IT professionals rework and influence a middle-class ethos are centrally tied to the imagining of a 'new' India that is ascendant on the global scene, one in which the economic success and morality of a hegemonic middle class becomes a powerful, albeit problematically exclusive, symbol of the nation.

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[2] *Indian IT Industry — Fact Sheet.* NASSCOM — Mc Kinsey Report. 2009. http://www.nasscom.org/Nasscom/templates/NormalPage.aspx?id=53615 (accessed 24 June 2009).

To examine these issues, I begin by characterizing the cultural hegemony of IT professionals on the crosscutting dimensions of class, gender, the nation, and the global economy, explaining why the IT workplace has become a key site for examining new cultures of middle-classness. Next, drawing from interviews and ethnographic research, I examine the ways in which new cultures are produced at the IT workplaces, focusing on how individuals and organizations reinterpret the norms of corporate America in a self-consciously distinctive cultural idiom. I trace the ways in which these processes interact with and, importantly, shape middle-class norms and culture outside the workplace, highlighting the centrality of gender in these processes. Throughout this discussion, I think through the ways in which IT professionals have become a metaphor for an emergent India, focusing on the legitimating symbols of gender and middle-class status.

Methods

The data for this essay is drawn from ethnographic research and interviews conducted in Mumbai and Bangalore for a period of 12 months between 2004 and 2007. I conducted 95 interviews with men and women, between the ages of 22 and 54, working in IT firms in various capacities — as engineers, technical writers, human resource personnel, and as managers at all levels. Sixty of my informants were women and 35 of them were men. In addition, I conducted in-depth ethnographic research with 14 informants working in the industry, most of whom were initially interviewed. I spent time with them in their homes, with their families, during their leisure time, during their lunch or tea breaks at work, and sometimes accompanied them to or from work, establishing close friendships with many of them and gaining an intimate look at their everyday lives.

Most of those interviewed come from families which were supported by the salary of a single male breadwinner while growing up, usually the father, who would usually have worked in a government job. This profile is by and large typical of the industry (Upadhya and Vasavi 2006). Thus, although almost all of these professionals come from financially stable families, relatively few come from elite or upper-class families, and the few who do can be very conscious of their difference from their co-workers. The influx of women in highly paid IT jobs reflects increased opportunities for women in the workplace and has prompted a shift in what constitutes respectability among India's upwardly mobile urban middle classes, where conventionally, most women have been expected not to work outside the home. Moreover, the high salaries of IT women contribute significantly to increasing levels of wealth in a class that had few luxuries in a previous generation. Interviews with women offered a method through which to explore the cultural dimensions of the changes that the IT boom has brought to India, as these women tended to reflect deeply upon the changes that the industry had heralded into their lives, and clearly articulated the challenges that they faced in negotiating between their personal and professional lives. Men tended to be less self-conscious about such matters, but nonetheless expressed sentiments about gender, class, respectability, and a rapidly changing cultural milieu that were closely aligned with those of women.

Interviews generally lasted between 60 and 90 minutes, and were conducted in a semi-structured fashion. Participants discussed the trajectory they went through to reach their current job position, their family lives, and their hopes and aspirations for the future. Professional IT women and men viewed me, an Indian–American woman of immigrant parents, as sharing with them a common cultural repertoire, and thus were forthcoming about both their pride and their doubts about their Indian identification. The perception of a shared set of cultural understandings led interviewees to express interest in how I navigated many of the same issues I asked them about, and the exchanges that followed were often a critical part of the interview.

Crosscutting hegemonies: Examining the economic and symbolic power of IT professionals

To characterize the culture of Indian middle-classness and understand the ways in which gender, new forms of work and the nation interact, an analytic approach that is sensitive to multiple dimensions of power is required. Transnational feminism and intersectional analysis both offer compelling tools for characterizing power in unequal societies. In postcolonial contexts, transnational feminist scholars have argued that postcolonial articulations of what is 'global' or 'modern' articulate a syncretic culture that rejects the West as a point of comparison. Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan (1994) refer to these transnational concentrations of power as, 'scattered hegemonies', which we can understand through careful attention to location and historical context. The term recognizes the multiple layers of power relations that give rise to such a powerful group in a postcolonial context, drawing attention to gender, class and nation. Although the notion of 'scattered hegemonies' has been influential, the term has been interpreted only loosely, in a range of often contrasting ways, suggesting that the analytical capacity of the term may be limited (Bracke 2003; Burawoy et al. 2000; Radcliffe 2001; Radcliffe et al. 2004). In contrast, feminists of colour in the US have produced a rich body of scholarship that examines race, class and gender as interconnected and constitutive of each other in an approach widely known as 'intersectional analysis' (Brewer et al. 2002; Collins 1991; hooks 1984). While intersectional analysis has proven highly fruitful as an analytical approach for understanding particularly the experiences of women of colour in the US, an exclusive focus on race, class and gender has made it difficult to study other kinds of power using the same analytical tools. Here, I merge the specificity of the method of intersectional analysis with the conceptual attention to hegemony, capitalism and cultural power found in a transnational feminist approach to analyze the ways in which IT professionals occupy a dominant position in several *crosscutting hegemonies* encompassing multiple scales. Such an approach elaborates upon and extends intersectional analysis as well as a transnational feminist approach, while situating IT professionals within the material and symbolic space of the increasingly transnational Indian middle class. IT professionals not only occupy an overwhelmingly dominant class position within India, they also occupy a dominant position in the global economy, as symbolic analysts. Just as importantly, IT professionals also stand in a dominant position with regard to gender and nationalist hierarchies. I will situate each of these positions in turn.

Despite the worldwide marketing obsession with India's booming middle class, the category continues to be a relatively exclusive one. Whether measured by income, consumption, or by a combination of the two factors, India's middle class is, by even the most generous standards, around 10 per cent of its entire population (Deshpande 2003). The cultural capital associated with middle-class status, marked by educational attainment, proficiency in the English language and a host of other 'soft skills', makes the category even more exclusive and difficult to quantify. Employment in the IT industry usually represents the culmination of all these dimensions of middle-class status. In their large-scale survey, Carol Upadhya and A. R. Vasavi (2006) have shown that most IT professionals come from relatively privileged backgrounds, while Leela Fernandes and Patrick Heller (2006) have suggested that new industries like IT tend to reproduce, rather than disrupt, class divisions by passing down cultural distinction and making class boundaries rigid. By any reasonable measure, then, IT professionals occupy a tiny, privileged section of India's middle and upper class.

In terms of the global economy as well, Indian IT professionals occupy a position of privilege. Robert Reich's now classic formulation of work in the global economy (1991) characterizes symbolic analysts as the most privileged workers in the global economy. Symbolic analytic work includes 'problem-solving, problem-identifying, and strategic-brokering activities' that must compete on a global market and encompasses work ranging from software engineering to public relations. But unlike routine production work, which involves repetition, symbolic analytic work is not standardized, and must compete on the basis of its specific creative contribution to a larger production process, usually stretched across space (ibid.: 177). Many accounts of India's software sector characterize IT work in India as being more like routine production jobs, requiring routine coding and maintenance that does not call for specialized problem-solving skills (Khadria 2001; Konana and Balasubramanium 2002). More recent accounts argue, however, that India is moving up the value chain and is no longer simply a low-wage destination (Richter and Banerjee 2003).[3] A. Aneesh's recent ethnography on IT workplaces (2006) suggests that it is the symbolic language of code in itself that structures the interactions between India and the rest of the world. If the sym-bolic language of code serves as a vehicle of 'access' and 'belonging' to global networks, as Aneesh's account argues, then Indian IT professionals occupy a specialized, privileged segment of the global economy. Whether or not Indian IT professionals earn wages com-parable to those earned in the US or Europe, they are included in a symbolic system that allows them to 'virtually' migrate, thus placing them in a privileged position in relation to other workers in the global economy (ibid.). Such a view elaborates upon Manuel Castells's (2000) conception of a network society in which those connected to the network are able to participate in global processes, while those who are not connected are 'structurally irrelevant'. The language of code and their participation in global networks places Indian IT workers in a hegemonic upper tier of the global economy.

Class hegemony at multiple scales is inevitably embedded in a complex matrix of symbolic hegemonies at a local level. In particular, the hegemony of IT professionals is constituted through gender and nationalist hierarchies. Respectable femininity has historically been a key mode through which 'modernity' is reconciled with an authentic national culture in India. Indian women, particularly middle-class ones, have long acted as idealized markers of Indian national culture. Representations of this ideal have shifted over time, reflecting socio-political and economic changes (Basu 1995; P. Chatterjee 1989a; Puri 1999; Sen 2002). A contemporary media focus on the 'new Indian woman' suggests that professional women, especially in such high-profile industries as IT, have come to signify broad progress for India, indicating advancement in a country long thought to be burdened with patriarchal traditions

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[3] See also Guy de Jonquières, 'India's Knowledge Economy', *Financial Times*, 15 May 2005, http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/display.article?id=5487 (accessed 24 June 2009); and Sumeet Kaul, 'More IITians Pass up US Degrees for High-paying Jobs Here', *The Hindu Business Line,* 29 March 2005, http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/2005/05/15/stories/2005051501670100.htm (accessed 25 October 2007).

(Oza 2006). Increased numbers of professional women working in IT, coinciding with India's success in international beauty pageants, have popularized the ideal of a woman who is both 'global' and 'Indian'; a woman who could both garner respectability in her society and improve the image of India for the world (Ahmed-Ghosh 2003; Parameswaran 2004). Women working in IT thus occupy a critical symbolic space at a historical juncture during which meanings of respectable femininity, tied closely with the meaning of national culture itself, are undergoing rapid change. As individuals who are already in a position of class hegemony, professional IT women are subject to the norms of middle-class respectability, even as they reshape and redefine that respectability. The femininity enacted at the IT workplace by professional IT women speaks to the symbolic privilege that they enjoy as middle-class women at the helm of a new class of symbolic analysts, which represent a bright future for the nation. Attention to the production of respectable forms of femininity, thus, allows us to specify the ways in which discourses of national culture rely upon naturalized, culturally specific understandings of masculinity and femininity to create a sense of belonging among its group members.

The respectability of IT women provides an affirmation of a particular kind of cultural identity that reflects the nation, even as the high status of symbolic–analytic work in the global economy affirms a development strategy for the nation that is focused on high-end growth and abstract knowledge. Elsewhere, I have examined the contradictions entailed in the 'knowledge for development' strategies that have come to occupy the attention of development practitioners around the world (Radhakrishnan 2007). In India, knowledge workers, particularly those in the IT industry, have drawn attention to the country as a model for growth, led by a liberalizing economy that attracts significant foreign and domestic investment, particularly in the IT sector. The emerging notion of India as a 'global' nation, then, is importantly informed by India's position as one of the global leaders in IT work, the most cutting-edge industry in the global economy.

Not only does their participation in the knowledge economy make IT professionals icons of post-liberalization national development strategies, but the culture and lifestyle of IT professionals has also come to serve as an emblem of the new India's culture. Scholars of the Indian middle class have long argued that this class holds a special ideological weight in imagining the Indian nation (P. Chatterjee 1989a; Deshpande 2003; Fernandes 2001; Varma 1998). While an 'old' middle class of government workers was characterized by an austere culture of saving and an orientation towards state-led national development goals, a 'new' middle class is characterized as possessing a hunger for global consumer goods and a conscientious integration into the global political economy. Yet, even for this seemingly outward-oriented class, the nation has far from disappeared. Indeed, as many analysts have noted, the 'new' middle class has been shown to display often conservative or nationalist values, paired with a sense that turning away from the nation has become a way in which to *serve* the nation, both economically and culturally (Deshpande 1993; Fernandes 2000b; Rajagopal 1999).[4] It is not surprising, then, that IT professionals enact cultural norms established as nationalist, even as they reshape them, self-consciously 'globalizing' the idea of Indianness.

In these ways, Indian IT professionals occupy a hegemonic position in the national imagination vis-à-vis several dimensions that crosscut and intersect each other. With regard to class, IT professionals extend the cultural and economic capital of an old Indian middle class, even as they assert their privilege in the global economy. In this context, the enactment of respectable femininity becomes a specific mode through which cultural hegemony with regard to the nation is expressed, even as it is being reinvented on an everyday basis. Such an examination of class position in the nation, in the global economy, as well as in the symbolic realms of gender and nationalist hierarchies helps to deconstruct and characterize the cultural and material hegemony of Indian IT professionals.

Given these specifications, I now turn my attention to the everyday ways in which IT professionals navigate this position, with special attention to respectable femininity. I begin by showing how the norms of corporate America are translated into an 'Indian' idiom, and then go on to explore some of the ways in which IT professionals self-consciously carry these new norms and cultural practices into the realm of the home and back again in a continuous process of reinvention and reinforcement that renders invisible to themselves their own privileges, even as it serves to provide a greater sense of ideological integration between national and global cultures.

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[4] See also William Mazzarella, 'Middle Class' in Rachel Dwyer (ed.), *South Asia Keywords* (2005), http://www.soas.ac.uk/csasfiles/keywords/Mazzarella-middleclass.pdf (accessed 15 June 2006).

Global (American) corporate style and the Indian brand

When asked to describe the work they do and why that work is meaningful, IT professionals almost always describe the industry as a 'global' one. Built into that easy descriptor is a whole range of characteristics that constitute the culture of IT work. Here, I tease out the multiple meanings of 'global work' to demonstrate the ways in which the term conceals the emulation of corporate American culture, even as it sets out to be self-consciously 'Indian', and thus culturally distinctive.

For those working in IT, the global characteristics of the work are self-evident. At the most fundamental level, IT firms specialize in 'offshore' operations, giving the industry a remarkably global character. In an 'offshore' outsourcing model, companies located (usually) in the US or Europe relocate specific projects to a team abroad, which completes the work either on a contractual basis, or as a subsidiary, or as a branch, or as a partner of the client firm. An 'offshore' model, at least in theory, offers the advantage of lower economic costs as well as the opportunity to work around the clock.[5] In the case of India–US partnerships, for example, because of a favourable exchange rate, highly qualified software engineers in India cost roughly one-tenth of what similar talent would cost in the US. Because of the time difference, software engineers in India work while the 'on-site' team in the US sleeps, expanding the productive hours of the firm. This model has allowed Indian IT firms to establish partnerships with leading global multinationals, and these ties have grown stronger as the industry has matured and talent in India has become more sophisticated. As a result of these arrangements, IT professionals in India are very likely to frequently interact with management in the US or Europe through phone and e-mail. They speak in English and must overcome any communication barriers that may arise. In addition, more and more engineers go 'on site' for short periods to work for a client firm, dramatically increasing the opportunities for thousands of young Indian IT professionals to have the experience of living and working in the US or Europe.

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[5] Fieldwork among management both on the Indian and the US sides suggested that this arrangement is not so straightforward. Teams in India are very often less efficient than similar teams in the US, and often fall short when it comes to problem-solving and troubleshooting. Still, the lower pay scales make outsourcing to India a financial necessity for many US-based tech firms in order to remain competitive.

As I experienced during my visits to firms in Mumbai and Bangalore, large IT offices in India are built to look as similar as possible to their counterparts in the US, usually in glaring contrast to their physical environments. Such offices are often housed in multi-storeyed buildings with a reflective glass façade and prominent signage that brands the building. In terms of design and aesthetics, then, IT offices are disconnected from the existing urban fabric in order to create a 'global' look. This disjuncture from the surroundings is further reinforced by walls or gates and strict security measures that restrict the people who may enter the building, giving off the impression of a technology fortress that requires protection from the rest of the city. As such, employees entering these buildings with a swipe of a magnetized security badge experience a sense of privilege in being a part of this protected world, and each day, perceive a clear demarcation between chaotic urban surroundings and the technological cleanliness and efficiency of the office. Inside, IT offices are modular in design, such that all cubicles, conference rooms and communal spaces look similar within a given building. Even between two firms, there are few distinctions in the set-up of the interior space. Each of these features is clearly intended to emulate the large tech offices of the Silicon Valley that are designed for a completely different climate and urban setting. For employees, this spatial and visual layout signals 'global' conditions. Security, air conditioning, high-speed Internet, granite flooring, and sparkling canteens affirm that these employees are producing code under the same conditions it would be produced anywhere in the world.

Apart from the global scope of the industry's operations and the architecture of its offices, Indian IT professionals understand the workplace to be governed by what, during my fieldwork, was repeatedly referred to as a 'global work culture'. Carol Upadhya (2008a) has observed that 'global culture' or 'global corporate culture' are terms used repeatedly in cultural training sessions among the Bangalore IT firms she studied. In these training sessions, employees come to accept American-style corporate culture as a 'global corporate culture', to which they must adapt during the time they are at work in order to perform well at their jobs. Upadhya's work suggests that 'global work culture' might operate merely as a euphemism for the hegemony of American corporate culture in India's tech industry. Employees learn an American style of working, and adapt to that style for economic pay-offs. Yet, the ways in which a 'global work culture' comes to operate within the workplace suggests that there is more than just top-down cultural homogenization at work here.

Indian multinationals take particularly great pains to transform themselves into global companies, but this transformation is not simply one of imitation. Sneha, a 24-year-old Master of Business Administration (MBA) graduate from an upper-class family in Delhi, worked in upper-level marketing and global management in the corporate sector of a major Indian multinational based out of Mumbai when I met her. She was specifically hired to assist in developing a 'global' brand for the company. Like many other Indian companies, Sneha's firm had moved up the value chain, shifting away from providing low value-added services to providing a wide range of expertise and services. Sneha was hired at the corporate level to give the company what she called 'the same look, the same feel' as other global multinationals, and she worked on whatever projects she believed would contribute to that end. Her work was mostly internal, ranging from instituting employee-oriented incentives programmes similar to those in other multinationals to organizing the implementation of a high-speed wireless network in all the offices. By 'global', however, Sneha's company very self-consciously did *not* mean to emulate America, even as they adopted standardized practices, American-style management and corporate culture. Rather, Sneha's narrative suggested that India as a unified national culture was unexpectedly reconstituted and reinforced in the interactions between her firm and foreign clients. She argued that within the tech industry, there had been a kind of growing self-awareness about how India's culture could be maintained and even asserted in a global corporate environment, which validated India as, what she called, 'part of the bigger picture'. Sneha explained:

> I think we're recognizing that we're good, and that we can wow people with traditional India. And I think that sense is coming not only from interacting with the West, but also others. Like, when you look at Japan, and see how proud they are of their culture, how they cling to their culture . . . If you go to Japan, they will give you sake, not French wine.

In Sneha's explanation, the success of India's corporate sector is closely connected to Indians coming to see their own culture as good and impressive. This understanding, attained in part through what Sneha called 'global interaction', underscores a traditional, authentic, but ultimately monolithic, interpretation of India that is being promoted and shored up through the success of Indian tech firms and the emergence of India as an IT brand. The shift towards 'the global', then, is in fact a reflection of India's new confidence about its own distinctive corporate culture, which now includes trips to the Taj Mahal and top-notch Indian cuisine at seven-star hotels for foreign corporate visitors.

Sneha's assertions about the complementarity of global corporate culture and a redefined notion of India fit in well with notions of global-ness and Indian-ness that circulate in corporate training programmes. Carol Upadhya notes that these programmes have the effect of 'dividing the world into distinct culturally defined workforces and locales that must be integrated into a functioning network' (Upadhya 2008a: 113). By 'cataloguing' nationalities according to typical cultural and personal traits, perceived cultural difference appears to be 'managed', while at the same time a monolithic view of various cultures gets reinforced. 'Global work culture', then, simultaneously participates in implementing an American-centred view of corporate culture and in fostering essentialized perspectives on India among Indian IT professionals.

Interviewees' perceptions of participating in a 'global work culture' reveal that even as American corporate culture is imposed, the cultural distinctiveness of India is shored up. Operationally, Indian IT work appears to be similar to its counterparts elsewhere.

Standards are imposed, and work around the world is synchronized, while shiny, secure buildings, visually disconnected from the surrounding urban fabric, self-consciously foster a sense of privilege and distinction from the rest of India. What becomes clear from Sneha's account of global work culture, however, is that 'the global' includes a corporate tech culture believed to be distinct from American corporate culture, though it emulates that culture in many respects. Indeed, at the heart of global corporate culture lies a belief in the distinctiveness of various world cultures, which should be preserved. In promoting a 'global work culture', then, India's multinational firms adapt to American corporate culture, but in so doing, produce a singular concept of India — a 'new' India that is confident and self-sufficient. How, then, is this idea of India sustained in the IT workplace? Is it simply the inevitable result of American corporate hegemony and training? Interview data suggest that the idea of the 'new India' produced in IT workplaces is far more complex and sophisticated than this, integrating idealized principles of corporate office culture with highly personalized notions of Indian cultural practice.

IT work as moral improvement for the self and the nation

The IT workplace is dominated by an ethic of pragmatic professionalism, wherein each employee is believed to be a part of a meritocracy that allocates rewards fairly. Participation in a system of merit-based advancement is thought to be not only benevolent but transformative as well. Interviewees consistently described personal change stemming from their participation in the industry, whether through heightened self-esteem or improved communication. By channelling the mental resources of India's middle class into a positive direction, IT is believed to foster a focus on performance and personal development. Personal change resulting from work in the IT sector is described in a range of ways: women focus on the confidence they gain, while men tend to focus on the acquisition of marketable skills. Those in management positions value their improved communication abilities, both within the office and beyond it. In comparison to the government jobs previously open to the educated middle class, IT work is believed to emphasize individual merit over politics and hierarchy, and open-mindedness over a narrow bureaucratic outlook. Chandra, a 28-year-old engineer working in Bangalore, explained:

> The previous generation, they wanted a secure government job. That has been almost replaced by IT. That work culture was different. I have seen people frustrated with that work culture. With the revolution of IT, the amount of politics and bureaucracy is much less, although it is there. That has helped me grow as a person . . . You definitely get to know a lot of good people, colleagues who are professionals — no unnecessary talk, no unnecessary business. They are sincere, and in the company of good people, you grow.

Chandra's views are emblematic of IT professionals; they emphasize not only a shift away from an 'old' model of middle-class work culture, but also the morality of it — that this shift fosters the development of good people. By asserting the morality of the people in IT, Chandra also unconsciously reinforces, through a naturalized language of ethical values, his ascending position in India's new middle class: he is qualified, educated and unwilling to dirty his hands in either the 'unnecessary' business of politicking or the constraints of government-style bureaucracy. 'Global work culture', then, becomes more than just a mark of the hegemony of corporate American culture; its 'professionalism' allows a class of educated professionals to justify their increasingly privileged status.

The professionalism that is so appealing to Chandra and others like him is an ethic produced within firms, and is viewed as a means through which to improve upon a pre-existing, implicitly worse Indian work culture. Ram, a Silicon Valley immigrant who moved back to India in order to pass on the virtuous, unchanging aspects of the country to his children, nonetheless spoke with pride about the ways in which he had been able to integrate what he called 'the positive sides of working in the US' into the practices of his Bangalore office, offering him the opportunity to open up the narrowness of Indian thinking. He explained that through the mentoring of senior management, he has been able to 'transform the Indian way of thinking' and bring in 'the pragmatism of the US culture of work'. Although Ram was clear in his thinking about the superiority of a 'true' Indian culture, he found American work ethics to be desirable, and self-consciously mainstreamed those ethics into his workplace. This move is seen not as a kind of undesirable 'Westernization', but rather as a desirable integration of 'global' work ethics that ultimately improve upon an essentially superior Indian culture.

The culture of professionalism, fostered in the IT workplace, prompts employees to rethink relations of power in many aspects of home life; the virtues of a meritocracy seem to spill over to the home in potentially transforming ways. Dhiraj, a 27-year-old technical consultant working with a large American multinational in Bangalore, was particularly attuned in the ways in which working in IT for the past five years had altered his interactions at home, adopting a more egalitarian 'management' strategy with servants, modelled on the styles he imbibed at work. Dhiraj explained:

> On my personal front I see you can learn a lot of things, like how you manage your time, your work, your customer calls. And you learn to manage your behaviour with your client and your Senior Management . . . All this learning replicates in your behaviour when you go home . . . like, maybe when you talk to your servant. Five years before I never used to think on these lines. I now replicate his working with my working [*sic*]. This is how my manager approaches me; this is how I get work from fellow colleagues. To get it done by my servant I do not have to treat him like a servant. I have learnt that you need to have a different way of thinking when you are talking to your juniors [than the conventional Indian way].

In a consistent pattern in the interviews, informants often called upon similar examples of relationships with servants to explain how the egalitarian culture of IT had transformed their mode of interaction with those working for them outside the workplace.

These interviews with men suggest that the working environment in IT is believed to foster positive personal growth that is fundamentally righteous and ethical. The experience of personal growth in itself provides a way to understand how the culture of the IT workplace spills over into personal lives, only to cycle back into the workplace again. As Dhiraj's narrative about his relationship with his servant suggests, however, these changes are not just personal, but deeply affect interpersonal relationships as well. What, then, are the gendered implications of a professional work ethic? How might gender complicate a story of IT work as personal betterment?

Professionalism and the new Indian woman

Professional IT women believe that their ability to adhere to such an ethic of professionalism and merit-based advancement attests to their commitment to these benevolent ethics, even though they experience the system differently from men. Interviewees consistently attested to the idea that women employees were granted the same chances as men to move up the hierarchy, though the IT industry was still male-dominated. Good work is rewarded with more challenging work and promotions. When there is a deadline, everyone must work to achieve it, regardless of gender or responsibilities at home. Human resources personnel and upper-level male management concurred with the other interviewees. While they all agreed that most women left the industry after five or six years, usually to have children, there was broad agreement that women did not face discrimination in IT. Many professional women I interviewed cited instances in which they were excluded from some networking opportunities available to men that, perhaps, would have helped them move up, yet almost all of them agreed that that was not a major obstacle. The perceived gender-blindness of the industry was understood as an important part of what constituted IT as a good job for women, in contrast to other industries, such as finance or marketing, which were believed to have more overtly masculinist work cultures. For example, Aparna, a 35-year-old manager in the upper echelons of a Mumbai-based IT firm, previously worked on the Mumbai Stock Exchange as a technology specialist. She believed that the finance world was much more male-dominated than IT. In the IT industry, she had managed to rise to the position of a delivery head, a position just below that of a vice president. For Aparna, then, the existence of a merit-based system in IT was proven by her own advancement within it.

Within the framework of the merit-based system, employees perceive advancement and change to be allocated fairly. Thus, even though the IT workplace may attract and retain only certain kinds of elite workers, the industry's position as the global edge of the nation comes to be viewed as just and merit-based, and therefore beyond criticism. Francine, a 22-year-old software programmer in Mumbai, took this totalizing belief in the merit-based system to its logical conclusion. When asked about her feelings about the persistently low ratios of women in management, Francine responded, 'Maybe women just aren't as capable! I'm not saying that they aren't, but I'm just saying that if women are just as capable as men, then there should be no problem to get to [top-management] positions! Nothing stopping them'. Francine's unqualified belief in the fairness of the merit-based system in her office led her to speculate that low percentages of women in upper management might reflect a shortcoming of women themselves. Because Francine was still in her first few months in the industry when I interviewed her, her words reflected the reputation of the industry at large, as well as the ideologies operative within the workplace, rather than her own cumulative experience within the industry. Although this is a particularly dramatic example of how far faith in merit-based advancement can go, Francine's reasoning is similar to the views expressed almost unanimously among all interviewees. Her words reveal that gender equality is not necessarily considered to be an overt aim of a merit-based system, but rather a happy side effect. As such, if women do not advance as often or as quickly as men, the system is not to be blamed.

The belief that everyone in the industry is valued according to his or her individual merit, rather than on the basis of gender, region, caste, or political abilities, fosters absolute trust in the system. The consistent success of women in IT provides evidence that the system is working towards the betterment of India, even though the ratios of women in management remain very low. But the importance of women's success in IT does not simply shore up the inherent value of a merit-based system; beyond this, it helps to legitimize and specify the moral and cultural hegemony of IT professionals in their everyday lives as men and women.

The ways in which the ethic of professionalism associated with IT has translated into more opportunities for women in particular is a source of significant pride. Indeed, the professionalism of IT becomes synonymous with the possibility of gender equality, thought to signal progress for women in India. The success of professional women in IT validates a professional ethic as a benevolent one, distinguishing the ethics of the industry as progressive and moral. Shankar, a 32-year-old graphic designer, explained:

> When I see a girl working in these [technical] areas, I feel very happy for her and her family. Whatever I have seen earlier or in other parts of India, that situation was very different. Now girls take their own decisions, which is good for them . . . The lifestyle she can dream of

> has changed. Earlier they had to think only of working in a bank or government job . . . Now they earn more than men!

For Shankar, the equal treatment that men and women receive in the IT workplace is a marker of progress for India as a whole, even though that progress is available only through IT. Professionalism in the workplace, employees understand, leads to more opportunities for women and a shift towards gender equality in a society conventionally thought to be constraining in this regard.

Dhiraj's experiences with colleagues at work have prompted him to seek out a prospective bride with an IT job. He explained that a woman working in IT would be more understanding of the hours he would have to work, and that women in the industry were able to 'manage their houses better than other middle-class girls'. But Dhiraj was also clear about the fact that his future wife should not be more than a secondary income earner:

> I wanted an employed girl not from the financial angle, but for her to have her space. She can go on working as long as she can manage. She should not be too enthusiastic about working, though. She should be a secondary income earner. Not sit at home and sit idle . . . All my classmates are married to employed girls from IT, and they are doing great.

Dhiraj's decision to marry a woman in IT who was not *too* ambitious underscores the coexistence of appropriate (non-threatening) femininity and an ethos of professionalism, wherein women can be good women, good spouses and good home 'managers' as long as their professional careers do not overtake their personal lives, an assumption implicit in Dhiraj's narrative.

Again, Dhiraj's choices provide an example of a concrete way in which immersion in the ideologies and culture of the IT workplace spills over into his home life, transforming his idea of a good woman. The limitations that he expects his wife will put on her career emerge from lessons he learns from his male and female colleagues, and he makes a pragmatic, culturally informed decision based on those experiences. These kinds of decisions, then, help to perpetuate, reinforce and ultimately justify, in moral terms, the particular brand of middle-class culture emerging in the IT workplace. How, then, does this culture get linked to culturally specific ideas of Indian-ness?

That 'Indian' ethos

Ideas of Indian cultural distinction and specificity are reinvented in tandem with new cultural mores and values. The virtuous culture of IT is believed to better reflect Indian values, especially in comparison with the culture of call-centre work, the fastest-growing segment of the Indian tech industry. IT workers' lack of respect for call-centre workers is closely linked to a belief in the cultural inferiority of the West, an idea that harkens back to nationalist ideals from the early 20th century — ideals that have persisted and even been reinforced among many middle-class Indians in light of the rise of Hindu nationalism since the 1990s (Chatterjee 1989b; Hansen 1999). The culture of IT is understood to be superior because of its tendency to uphold a set of 'Indian' cultural values. Ashok, a 33-year-old technical consultant with extensive experience abroad, explained that he did not wish to settle abroad because of his connection to his culture, which he equated with a non-materialistic ethos. In his words, the materialism of the West and the materialism of call-centre workers merged into one entity against which he distinguished himself and the industry:

> I do not want to leave things here for the sake of money . . . It is so materialistic everywhere else. There is a lack of personal bonds and maybe too much freedom, especially to teenagers in terms of their sexual behaviours and desires. You are not used to seeing that here, but it's changing. People here have become more materialistic and so permissive, but I will limit that to the call-centre industry . . . Call centres companies have actually started neglecting things . . . If you move away from your culture you lose . . . People in IT are less susceptible to this. I think there is a different culture here.

Ashok's narrative explains how a naturalized construction of 'IT culture' comes to stand in for cultural dominance and superiority at multiple levels and in contrast to a vast group of people. The IT culture that distinguishes the nation also distinguishes IT professionals from call-centre professionals. This begins to hint not only at the perceived cultural dominance of IT professionals, but also at a new vision of India in which technology, professionalism and 'culture' are melded together in an ideal fashion.

What does this superior IT culture rest upon, however? Aside from the educational credentials of IT workers, what are the ways in which a national culture is reinforced and legitimized? In IT workplaces, Indian family values are thought to be upheld because of a number of implicit compromises that professional IT women make in their careers. These compromises, again, are coded in cultural terms, and directly or indirectly highlight the superiority of Indian IT professionals, not only over their too-Westernized counterparts working in call centres, but also over other similarly privileged individuals in other locations. In the office, the choices and the performance of professional IT women demonstrate how the Indian family is constantly shaping work relations. High-performing women are consistently viewed by others as having sacrificed too much, while women who maintain what is constructed as an appropriate 'balance' between work and home are culturally valued, as Dhiraj's choices also attested to. In interviews, professional women consistently identified themselves as 'not that ambitious', while recognizing that other women, who might be 'so hell-bent on making it for themselves', as Mumbai-based project manager Anu put it, are prone to giving up the truly important part of life — family.

A gendered segmentation of the IT workplace supports the widespread conviction in IT offices that women prefer not to have careers that are too demanding. This segmentation is not seen as a bias, but rather is naturalized in gendered terms. Kala, a 38-year-old content writer for an e-learning company in Mumbai, explained:

> There's a great divide — between content, writing and coding. The writers and content people are mostly women. The coders are mostly men. It may not be written down anywhere, but these are the hard subjects and the soft subjects. Writing and graphics are the softer sides.

Indeed, in the office in which Kala worked the disproportionately high number of women surprised me, until I realized that the engineers who wrote software code worked on a different floor. All the employees on Kala's floor worked either on content writing or graphic design. Similarly, within coding, there is quality and maintenance work on the one hand, and research and development on the other. Women who remain in the industry beyond the five-year threshold are much more likely to pursue quality and maintenance work, where the hours are more predictable and the work less stressful and deadline-driven. Research and development work, then, is the most male segment of the workforce, where deadlines are stiff, pressure is high, and the hours unpredictable. All these kinds of segmentations, although transparent to most professional women I interviewed who had worked in the industry for more than five years, were not viewed as evidence of a bias or an obstacle. Instead, the segmentation was considered 'natural' and as arising due to a combination of the choices that women make, as well as their own natural inclinations.

In a striking affirmation of these trends, Malini, a manager in a large Bangalore-based multinational Indian firm, suggested that her firm implicitly promoted a particular brand of respectable femininity, even going so far as to imply that the firm's overall 'conservative culture' was related to the respectability, especially of its women workers:

> They don't like it when a woman is in their face. They expect you to be a little womanly . . . If they notice that you have a husband or you have a family and talk about *puja* or something, it gels well with that south Indian middle-class ethos . . . I've never seen an example of anyone [in this firm] who does not fit that . . . And, well, [our firm] is all-round conservative. I have not seen overtly sexist attitudes. Our common thought is that women don't want to be around. They have a lot of other things that keep them busy . . . Even in our work [as a firm], we don't take too many chances in expressing ourselves loud and clear . . . Even at the strategy level, we don't have independent thinkers.

In Malini's narrative, a woman who 'gels' with a certain kind of cultural 'ethos' is the kind who is valued and supported in the careful work environment of her IT firm. In her words, 'conservative' does not indicate just traditional values, but also risk-aversion. In the same sense, a woman who appears to reject a national cultural ethos is risky, and implicitly, a potential liability for the firm and for the nation.

Professional women are not just 'subjected' to these constructions of femininity and work at the workplace; they also actively 'construct' them. Meena, who narrated the enactment of appropriate Indian femininity in the context of 'sari day', provides a clear example of the ways in which Indian women draw upon discourses of national culture and the Indian family to define the parameters of their everyday work schedules, in contrast to women elsewhere who do not make these important sacrifices. Meena, a mechanical engineer based in Bangalore, began her career in an Indian firm, where she loved the technical challenges of her job and thrived on them. She worked long hours and was a top performer. During this time, she had a child, whom she spent a great deal of time away from because of her commitment to her career. In the year before I spoke to her, Meena had begun to feel that she had missed out on too much of her child's life and had failed her as a mother. She found a new, less-challenging job at a multinational company, where in her initial interview she told the management that she would always leave the office at six, without any exceptions. As much as she loved working, she felt her previous commitment to it had been a mistake and that ultimately, she was glad that she was not the primary breadwinner in the family. Meena's decisions and views hinged on the option that she could stop working if she wanted to. More importantly, she viewed her decisions as underscoring something special about Indian womanhood. When asked what it was about Indian-ness that she wished to preserve, Meena explained:

> I still like the fact that women are the homemakers. I still like that. Because I think we have been blessed with that innate thing for caring . . . After so many years, I've reached a stage where I am part of technology, but it wouldn't bother me if I'm considered as just an Indian woman. I'm okay with that.

Meena's professional success and her choice to scale back her career to look after her child served only to reinforce her identification as an Indian woman. Like many other interviewees, Meena believed that Indian women in IT had a special role not only in defining a new kind of femininity, but also in providing a model work ethic for the workplace, one that was modelled on professionalism, compromise and a softer touch. These convictions arose out of her experience in IT offices, and also from her own invocation of norms to set boundaries around her professional life. For Meena, the transition to a less-demanding job was not simply a personal one for her daughter and her family, but also one through which she was helping to define professionally appropriate femininity at the workplace.

Neeta, an optics engineer in Bangalore, presented another compelling example of how ideas about India and Indian-ness are reworked through new femininities constructed in the milieu of

IT work. Like Meena, Neeta was confident of her contribution to a global set of cultural meanings about appropriate womanhood. At the same time, Neeta's tone was less triumphal. She repeatedly explained that even though women were performing well in the office and earning good money, they should not expect relationships with their husband or others in the family to change as a result. This logic helped her understand her own husband's inflexible view of gender roles in the home. Neeta took pride in the ability of Indian women to uphold conventional morals and values while still being able to travel, earn money and be successful in a male-dominated world:

> [When she starts working,] I think that a girl who is seen as downtrodden is getting another look [at herself] — yes, she is as good as the other person. She can do anything . . . The Indian woman has a lot of roles to play. You are known for a lot of good things. So, it's really a challenge for you to take those good things forward. And definitely being something worthy for the globe. Yes, you are an Indian, yes, you are in IT. When they gain such fame, they also have to live up to it . . . [It's important to have only] one husband. Keep up your moral values.

Despite Neeta's three years of graduate education in the US, she was convinced that a materialistic American culture in which people had no morals was sure to perish, while India's superior culture, based on giving, compromise and monogamy, had a better chance of surviving in the long term. For her, working in an American multinational provided her with the opportunity for intellectual stimulation and financial freedom, but nothing more. Rather than discussing the lessons of IT's 'global work culture' for herself, she asserted her deep connection to a monolithic and essentialist notion of Indian femininity more than ever. However, what is apparent from Neeta's account of her navigations of home and work is that her adherence to a particular mode of Indian femininity exists not despite her involvement in the IT workplace, as she appears to argue, but because of it. In my discussions with her, she used her work and educational experiences in the US to make authoritative generalizations about American culture as essentially different from Indian culture, while her success at work allowed her, by her own account, to maintain a sense of self in the face of an overbearing husband.

The examples of Meena and Neeta support the idea that particular constructions of an Indian national culture are being crafted and recreated in IT offices, and that these constructions are explored and reinforced through the new femininities that crystallize through everyday interactions. Like the persistence of essential national difference in the rhetoric of global management, these new femininities frame their contribution and participation in 'the global' in a language of essential difference.

IT success as a symbol of the new India

The success of India's IT industry has become emblematic of the country's post-liberalization success. In international development circles, its sustained expansion has been viewed as exemplary in creating a 'knowledge society', while in the US and Europe, frequent depictions of the new India as a global economic power hinge upon portrayals of an endlessly booming tech industry run by educated, ambitious engineers. IT professionals themselves experience the repute and high standing of their industry on the landscape of a powerful new India. However, the high status of their work does not prevent them from seeing their own experiences as the norm in a rapidly changing urban cultural milieu. Indeed, by claiming middle-class status, these professionals assert a non-elite position in the national imaginary. This ideological move is made possible by the relatively uniform economic backgrounds that these individuals come from, as well as by the ways in which the culture of the IT workplace interacts with the larger formation of middle-class culture. In the everyday cultural dynamics of India's IT professionals, the values, ideals and morals of the Indian middle class are being influenced in a profound way. This influence is legitimized through the dominant positions in the crosscutting hegemonies that these professionals inhabit.

A gendered examination illuminates the processes through which IT professionals come to naturalize their economic and symbolic hegemony of the culture of IT, and reveals how a singular idea of India is developed through the navigation of professional, domestic and nationalist identities. By constructing an easy complicity between 'Indian culture' and 'global' sensibilities/values through gender, IT professionals can represent themselves as the middle-class norm of the nation, thus denying their elite status and shoring up the idea of a confident, economically strong new nation. Respectable femininity is a key component of this new middle-class culture, and fuses long-standing notions of ideal womanhood drawn from colonial and nationalist constructs with the ideals of the corporate workplace, especially the ethics of professionalism and a merit-based system. The product of these two imaginaries is a contested and highly uneven discourse of appropriate femininity that appeals to women to work, but not for endless personal gain; that appeals to women to stay home when needed, but not to lead an 'idle' life. Women and men constantly negotiate the terms of this discourse in their everyday lives, and in doing so, shape ideals of middle-classness as well. Since the middle class has historically been so centrally involved in imagining, projecting and embodying the essence of the nation in India, the negotiations of the men and women in cutting-edge industries like IT come to symbolize a new India as a whole. As in all cultural negotiations, gender provides insights into the material and symbolic linkages that allow a privileged elite to become a powerful symbol for a confident nation discovering itself anew.

9

The Middle-class Child: Ruminations on Failure

Nita Kumar

The terminology of 'success' and 'failure' imbues the discourse of the middle-class child in India. Middle-classness is defined and supported by the success of the child, and destroyed by the child's failure. We know that this success is premised on the acquisition of economic, social and, particularly, cultural capital, but we have few narratives and analyses of how failure occurs, or of middle-class ways of handling failure. To pursue this, I discuss first the sites in which the persona of the middle-class child has been, and continues to be, produced: the family and the school. I note the significant historical continuity in this production. We can then see that these very sites of middle-classness are where failure occurs. Moving on from the discourse of the child to the experience of the child, we can ask further, what is at stake in this investiture of middle-class status on the body and mind of the child, that is, what does the child lose or gain by not successfully promoting the pursuit of the middle-classness of the family?

How to recognize the middle-class child

Before embarking on the different arguments introduced here, let us look at two vignettes of middle-class children:

Vignette I

Sarvesh Tiwari's son and daughter sit studying with a tutor in the courtyard of their smart cemented house in the village. Sarvesh is the most important man in the village who has, while still in his thirties, become wealthy through illicit trade. His house epitomizes social mobility: it is large, solid, bright pink, neither a colonial bungalow style nor the rural design of the area, but with selected features of both and a prominent dish antenna on the roof. The children, sitting in the courtyard at a table, have notebooks in front of them with lists of words translating English into Hindi. They sit bored, clearly envious of a younger cousin who is playing nearby. They are dressed in fashionable ready-made clothes — a tight, short skirt and top for the 10-year-old girl and designer pants and shirt for the eight-year-old boy.

The children do not greet me as I enter, nor does the tutor ask them to. This is telling, since *everyone* in the village would greet seniors, or be reprimanded by an older neighbour if they neglected to do so. I chat with the tutor about the children's work, who look bored and distant, and pointedly do not engage with me even when I try to be friendly. The little cousin, on the other hand, welcomes me, pulls a chair over for me, and grins and interacts. I learn that the two older children go to a private English-medium school, while he goes to the village school.

Vignette 2

Maumita is eight years old, in Class III of an elite private school in Kolkata. She has various items of homework which she sits at a table and tackles. Her mother sits with her. 'Write properly, Titli [her pet name]', instructs her mother. Further, 'Sit nicely'. 'Why are you not paying attention?' The child continues to work with adequate concentration and interest, as far as I can tell. The mother continues to sit and supervise, continuously providing comments and instructions, the gist of which is that Titli is not to be trusted and has a *chanchal* or indisciplined mind, and that she had better be very careful if she wants to do well at school.

The mother has arranged everything in the house so that it revolves around the child: the room plans, meal times, the maidservant, TV-viewing, the father's interaction with the child, and, of course, larger practical and social activities. She herself, though a PhD, will not work until the child is seen successfully through school. Apart from schoolwork, the mother supervises Maumita's extra-scholastic activities, personally taking her to swimming, music and dance classes. She tells me that she carefully regulates Maumita's diet so that her energy level can be of a requisite level for her to do well in all her work.

This is the middle-class child. As Sarvesh's son and daughter and Maumita exemplify, the location of the child could be in a family that is rural or urban, educated for several generations or newly educated, and hailing from what would intuitively seem to be radically different regions of the country. But in either case, they are daily exposed to the message that theirs is a sacred mission — to succeed. Whatever fantasies and dreams they have of leisure and pleasure are relegated to a side by the parents, who say quite explicitly: 'If you fail, you will be like a farmer'. 'Don't study and you will end up like a labourer'. 'Listen to us and you will not regret it your whole life. Disobey us and you will cry all your life'. Threats can be even more dire, such as one by the middle-class Pragati Sarkar who handed his 12-year-old son a stick and said, 'Beat me! Beat me to death! Because there is no point in living to see you fail'. The child cooperates because of the successful combination of threats, blackmail and disciplining, or, as we could say more rigorously, because of the successful politics of the family.[1] This particular form of bondage that a child is subjected to is well-documented in history,[2] in anthropology,[3] but surely the most eloquently in fiction:

> His father wanted him to be a success in life: a manager in a large company, perhaps. Everywhere in the lane, fathers prayed their sons would be successes. One would be a doctor because his father had once wanted to be a doctor. Another would be an engineer. Another would go to America and be a famous scientist. No effort would be spared; 'failure' and 'career' had become Bengali words, incorporated unconsciously but feverishly into daily Bengali parlance.
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> . . . . The urge to do well, which existed behind closed windows like libido, was sad and strangely obscene, because no one would admit to it. Meanwhile, children, like Egyptian slaves, dragged huge blocks of frustrating study all day to build that impressive but non-existent pyramid of success. (N. Chaudhuri 1990: 18–19)

In terms of her/his location, the middle-class child is both alone and in a crowd. As a recent comic strip puts it, s/he is special because s/he is using a select luxury item, but she is finally like thousands of others for whom the item is a must, so she is, in fact, a nobody.[4] This simultaneous specialness and facelessness is experienced many times over, specifically with regard to clothes and lifestyle. The home is always special: Sarvesh reiterates for his children's benefit the fact that they are highly placed in the village — but the home is also the same. The comparison typically made is with other similar homes as seen in the media and in real life. This is all deliberate. The furniture must announce middle-classness; the curtains, the wall tiles, the clothes, the food, the electronic goods must all be true to the class.[5] That they are like everybody else's is simultaneously the tragedy as well as the triumph. It is of course the professional skill of advertisers to create the effect of specialness in anonymity: the message of 'you can only be special if you are like everyone else' is a necessary corollary of the size and positioning of the middle class.

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[1] All the descriptions in this essay are based on ethnographic research carried on in Kolkata, Varanasi, Betawar, and Delhi, over 2002 and 2006. I would like to thank the Indo-Dutch Programme in Alternative Development (IDPAD) for providing funding for this project.

[2] The biographical record of any socially prominent or educated person could be cited here, and we could think of, literally, hundreds of references, such as to Surendranath Banerjea (in Walsh 1983).

[3] There is far less documentation of the fate of children in contemporary times because of the indifference of anthropology to the middle class; the excellent study by Sarah Dickey (2002), however, is one of a few.

There is a fascinating interlock between the home and the school in this project. The home provides the nurture and the specialness, but its message throughout is of the necessity of disciplining and conformity. The child, in fact, is told that she is not special. She must follow all the rules of the school as an anonymous institutional member. The middle-class child, such as the three discussed in the foregoing paragraphs, typically attends large crowded schools that emphasize conformity, where facelessness inside the school and entitlement outside the school walls, as part of a society threatened with illiteracy and backwardness, is of the essence.

The particular indifference of Sarvesh's children to an adult stranger was also typical. Partly, there are clear processes of consumerism that insist that to consume according to a certain class is to distance yourself from those who do not. The stranger, myself in this case, is unknown to the children, and in the absence of specific communication by family elders, the default understanding by the children is that she is not of their rank. The media constantly instructs the middle class in an epic role that is initially only glimpsed by the child and gradually becomes understood enough to produce snobbery. This mediation is continued in several definitions of the self. There are national versus international loyalties: the middle-class subject is 'by nature', or 'authentically', Indian,[6] but is 'obsessed' by the global.[7] Similarly, the middle-class child finds herself defined within gender and religious sectarian rules and adopts a triumphant rootedness in them, but trumpets them as an exercise of agency.

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[4] Scott Stantis, 'Prickly City', comic strip in *Los Angeles Times*, 24 February 2007.

[5] *Outlook*, 10 September 2007, p. 5.

This vulnerability to the media and selective rootedness in 'tradition' lacks the discipline of humility and 'culture' that the family might otherwise profess loyalty to, and asserts, rather, a more market-oriented sense of egocentrism and superiority. Together, the lessons in school (through both overt and hidden curricula) and in the family (through its practices) teach the child to be middle-class, as opposed to working class or high elite. The terms specifically used in north India by the middle class for itself are *madhyamik varg* and its derivatives. Equally, self-definition consists of contrasting itself with the uneducated, the rural, and the low class: the *ashikshit*, the *ganwar*, and *niche varg ke log.*

Historical continuities and disjunctures in the production of middle-classness in children

These observations in the foregoing section are of an ethnographic nature; equally may the middle class be grounded historically. The new education of the 19th century, succeeded by the new professions, created the economic and cultural bases for the middle class,[8] a class that had inherited privilege from upper-caste and urbanized forbears.[9] This new education with its use of English as a medium for higher instruction and its content of liberal studies that carried a whole unacknowledged weight of anti-Indian prejudice was an explicit definer of the new class identity.

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[6] Ibid., p. 17.

[7] *Competition Success Review*, September 2007, inside cover.

[8] Rachel Dwyer (2000) argues that this middle class, new to the 19th century, is old in India today, with the emergence of a nouveau riche class which should be properly regarded as the Indian middle class. The literature on this old middle class is vast, and also old, including classics such as Misra (1960) and Seal (1968).

[9] Again, the literature detailing the upper-caste stature of the new educated classes of the 19th century is vast, but see J. Brown (1972), Mines (1992) and Seal (1968). A debate between (among others) Cohn (1996) and Bayly (1996) focused on a somewhat different, more interesting, aspect of the legacy — whether there was a break or a continuity in the professional and cultural lives of these educated classes.

However, there was a deliberate alliance with an 'Indian' identity by the new middle class. This had nationalist roots, as we see from the case of the middle class in Bengal (P. Chatterjee 1993), specifically its recognition that while it had to act as a reformer, recognizing the degradation of the present, it could not do so as an unquestioning Westernizer. The Western experience simply could not stand up to the task. 'Being itself imperfect, how could the West make another part of the world perfect?' (ibid.: 49) The middle class was grounded, thus, in its middleness between the West and India (ibid.: 70).

They were 'Indian' too in that they did not, as Carolyn Steedman (1995) would put it, interiorize subjectivity through the medium of the child, thus producing a new subject — the child — and a new subject position, that of 'human interiority'. Insofar as their new subject position is a limited one, by all anthropological evidence, and has historical boundaries, as I argue here, there is a different history to middle-classness in India from that in Britain. The 'romance of nationhood' (ibid.: 6) that went together with the romance of childhood in Britain took a different form in India. India's 'romance of nationhood' was anti-imperial and highly gendered, and remained pre-occupied with a fitting response to the colonial challenge.

A good example of the middle-class personality was Mahadev Govind Ranade, born in 1842, celebrated as an eminent judge who rose to the highest post possible in the colonial state, and as a pre-eminent reformer who did not rest from constantly worrying about the problems, anxieties and suffering of the people around him, and who produced students and protégés worthy of himself. Elsewhere I have written on 'the 108th thing about Raja Rammohan Roy' to give testimony to the hundred-plus important 'things' that could be said about that modernizer. But Mahadev Govind Ranade deserves even more accolades for being representative, but also exceptional, in the qualities he represented.[10]

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[10] There is a caveat to make in this section of my essay. As often happens when looking at a contemporary issue historically, I find myself caught off-guard because the subtext does not hold valid for both the past and the present. The subtext in my discussion of the middle class is an irony

Ranade came from a family which would be considered typically middle-class today. It was modestly well off and had lived for at least four generations on the basis of its biggest capital, education. His great grandfather was the son of an astrologer and rose in civil service under the Patwardhan *sardars* (officers) of Ratnagiri district. His grandfather became a *mamlatdar* (ruler) under the British. His father, Govindrao, was originally under the British collectorate of Ahmednagar, which he left for the service of the Kolhapur State. As a young child, Ranade displayed the impatience of the privileged but sensitive child with the pushiness of his parents. They tried to display their position through the familiar devices of dress and accessories; he, on the other hand, hid from view the necklace, bracelets and rings with which he was bedecked by his mother on festive occasions. He was a diligent student and, having completed the course of Marathi–English education as far as it was possible to do in Kolhapur, was sent to study further in Bombay in 1857 at great discomfort and expense to the family. The University of Bombay had just been inaugurated, and Ranade was among its first students. He excelled in everything, but particularly in English, and was diligent about the optional Latin class. 'Indeed, he taxed himself so seriously and with such single-mindedness that a permanent defective eyesight was the result of his over-exertion' (Parvate 1964: 10).

Ranade had a sense of his Maratha nationality that was uncommon in English-educated people, such as there were, at the time. He critiqued British rule in favour of the Peshwas' rule, and wrote in defence of nationalism:

> To write the history of one's own country is always a pleasing task. The felicity and the pleasure (though a little alloyed with pain, when our former power and glory have departed from our nation, when the

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and an intellectual distancing regarding their singularity–sameness, their engagement–vacuity, their embeddedness–aloofness, as described above. In the case of the middle class in the mid-to-late 19th century and the early 20th century, I would like to drop the irony and the intellectual distancing. I would like to balance the meagre writing we have on them, which is brilliantly deconstructivist and reveals their failures as reformers and nationalists, with a more empathetic look at their self-definitions and understandings of modernity. I take them more empathetically as idealists (reformers, nationalists) than I do the contemporary middle class.

> land knows not its sons for its masters) are yet still great when one sits to write about the rise and progress of his own nation . . . Amidst the sickness so deadly and destruction so complete as now prevails through the land a warm and a patriotic bosom may prefer to breathe for a time purer air of more distant ages, when wealth, honour, liberty were the possession of his nation. With a mind filled with such thoughts, a heart throbbing with such pleasure (though it must be owned not unmixed with pain), it is that I sit to write this essay. (Parvate 1964: 12–13)

Ranade was awarded a first class in BA in 1862, and an MA in 1864. His reading list included Bacon, Byron, Buckle, Campbell, Carlyle, Gibbon, Hume, Locke, Macaulay, Maine, John and James Mill, Milton, Newman, Plato, Scott, Shakespeare, Shelley, the *Spectator*, Tocqueville, and Irving.[11] His principals and professors, and especially Sir Alexander Grant, his teacher, and Sir Bartle Frere, the Governor of Bombay and Chancellor of the University, praised Ranade's success in the mastery of English studies and considered him exemplary in proving to the world what English-educated Indians were capable of.

Elsewhere, in a work in preparation, I look at the details of some 100 'eminent' Indians, or members of the new educated class, and chart them according to generation with regard to their parenthood, their early years, their mothering, the languages they learnt, their early marriages, their first and second schools, and their college lives and subsequent careers. Ranade is representative of these (some) six to seven generations of the intelligentsia in the following ways (see M. G. Ranade 1964; R. Ranade 1938, 1963).

The families were typically not rich, and sometimes even had to struggle to live comfortably. The family did not live together: either one of the parents moved with the children to a town or larger city, or the children were put there with a guardian. No expense and care was spared in the education of the child. The child in turn was cognizant of this and careful to not let the care lavished on him be wasted. He imbibed well the early childhood lessons of concentration, frugality and discipline that were practised by his parents, his father being a hard-working, self-made man himself, and his mother coming from disciplined and educated parents (Moraes 1958; Narendranath 1998: 1–2; Pattabhiram 1984: 2; Sayeed 1983: 11–12).

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[11] To mention only those I recognize. In my research on education, I have found it an important and exciting link with earlier generations of English-educated people to search for the books they read, not merely as titles, but for the very books, in second-hand bookstores and in homes. Once in a while, one is rewarded with finding a volume, such as of Hazlitt (Sampson 1917), in which the comments on the margin are too many to mention here, but certainly add up to my description of 'the pleasures of serious study and the satisfaction of work well done', and make me empathetic to the extent of the internalization of the content of the books.

The typical young man, Ranade being representative, loved his education.[12] He read all the prescribed books and went beyond them. He worked hard even in the subjects that seemed less interesting because there were awards and applause to be had in return. There was also the sheer pleasure of mastery, the satisfaction of work well done, and the power of knowledge. The last was experienced very directly as door upon door opened up through examinations, and then the reward to be reaped from hard work no longer remained a matter of faith, but became one of experience.[13]

The more significant break between the past and the present is in the role played by the family as a site of education. The middle-class child, from approximately the 1850s to the 1950s, was educated in two sites, each powerful, didactic and subtle in its exercising of the hidden curriculum. While Ranade read the authors listed earlier, he also learnt *abhanga*s (verses by the *Bhakti* poets of Maharashtra) and the epics, Sanskrit and Marathi verses, and folklore and local histories. The hidden curriculum here, then, was socialization into what his family would have called *samskara*s (ritualized codes of conduct) and what we may call the gender, class and sectarian discourses of his subcaste. He grew up, as a result of this plural education in school and in the family, as a man with a rare sense of imagination and power, very skilled in the course of work demanded professionally, but also alive to future possibilities in his community and nation.

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[12] In this, Ranade was unlike the exceptional Rabindranath Tagore, one of the very few people in the 19th and 20th centuries, who roundly condemned the new education as uninspiring. Many, from Gandhi downwards, found it foreign and de-nationalizing — Aurobindo Ghosh being the most inspiring in his eloquent denunciation (A. Ghosh 1921, 1927, 1955; J. Ghosh 1929) — but Tagore articulated the most precise technical objections against it, and proposed specific alternatives (Tagore 1961, 1997).

[13] Much work has been done on the Bengali middle class called the *bhadralok* (especially in P. K. Bose 1996; Broomfield 1968; P. Chatterjee 1993; Kopf 1969, 1979; and S. Sarkar 1998). There are important overlaps between this literature and what I am arguing, particularly with respect to the importance of synthesis between an inherited Indian and a learnt European body of knowledge. However, my argument is for a continuity between the older educated and the present-day middle classes, and it would need more work done for me to be sure of where the Bengali bhadralok fit into the present.

For the last two generations, however, that is from post-Independence times, the family has been seen to be progressively less interested in its previous role. The space of the school in the child's life has expanded to make it not possible for the family to play the previous role if the child is to be successful in the competition for jobs and future studies. The legitimacy of the school's curriculum is highlighted over that of the family's. The family with an educational agenda that produces a child with samskaras is not as confident of the latter achieving worldly success as the family with the simple agenda to promote the child's scholastic success beyond anything else. In a series of interviews, parents reiterated that to see their children through different examinations was their only goal. Today, the middle-class child is celebrated as successfully pursuing these scholastic goals and as exemplifying what was said of Ranade, a kind of miracle: 'what English-educated Indians were capable of'. But unlike Ranade, the middle-class child of today is uneducated in another course of knowledge: the abhangas or other forms of verse, local histories, epics, and narratives of the self.

The sites of production of the middle-class child

I want to emphasize that the primary site of production of the middle-class child is still the family. As soon as the child becomes conscious, he becomes aware of the fact that he is treated with immense care. The family-planning discourse of the state itself proclaims that it is the middle-class, educated family that is marked by few children, specifically, with intense care devoted to each progeny, and therefore with success. The middle-class worship of the mother has throughout been a reflection of the gendered recognition of the importance of the survival of the bloodline, of course, but also of the social and cultural reproduction of generations. The mother, on the model of Maumita's mother at the beginning of this essay, would bear every discomfort in order to give support to the child. The child knows he is special. One of the keys to mobility, if not *the* major key, from a lower-class to a middle-class family is the attention that parents start to give to the child or children, and the recognition of this attention expected from, and then given by, the child to the parents. This discourse of the 'self-sacrificing mother' and the 'dutiful progeny' is par excellence a middle-class, and not an upper- or lower-class, discourse.[14]

More important than nutrition, clothing or any other indication of care or sacrifice is the choice of education for the child. It is always expensive and typically reported as being beyond the means of the family. But the parents decide to cut down on some other expenses, or to struggle harder to raise money, and somehow afford it. We only know, both in history and ethnography, in broad, coarse terms about the decisions made in balancing the child's potential career and the interests of the family with the expense of school and college education. A clear calculus certainly does not exist in the minds of the parents, and has not been researched yet. But we know that it is typical of middle-class families to see education as 'the single most important factor in improving their children's chances for the future' (Dickey 2002: 218).

The hurdles faced by the family in this regard are manifold. Expenses are high; apart from the fees, there are uniforms, books, stationery and other supplies, tuitions, and socialization with classmates. There is the need for a space to study in, for a table and chair and lights. There is the nutrition needed by a scholar, imagined as being more crucial than what is needed by someone engaged in other activities. There is the loss of the child's time and share in work, either domestic or external. On top of all this, the family often paints itself as comparatively uneducated and therefore unable to help the struggling student in essential ways, and even holding him/her back through its own backwardness; or, if not backward in this respect, then on the verge of denying the child necessary support because of one or the other parent's alternative commitments. Social events and visits by parents must be cancelled if the student is having tests in school. All of the family's schedule should ideally be planned around the child's scholastic requirements. Since this is impossible for most people — wedding *muhurt*s (auspicious dates) can only be manipulated thus far — the family lives in a paroxysm of guilt regarding whether it is giving the child due time and support.

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[14] For a detailed discussion of the role of mothering in the lives of the new educated classes, see N. Kumar (2007: Chapter 6).

But the family persists and supports the child through his/her education. The school is thus the secondary, promoted to the primary, site for the production of middle-classness. The immediate production is of a trained individual who is familiar with the rubric of modernity. If in the past, Mahadev Govind Ranade learnt his Shelley, Milton and Shakespeare, in the present, his reincarnation, Anjali, as described by Sara Dickey (2002), learns graphic designing and computer skills. Mahadev got into the University of Bombay through a competitive examination; Anjali likewise gets into a BCom course through a competitive examination. Mahadev got a position in the judiciary through yet another examination, and Anjali gets a job in a graphics design office. Mahadev set up his own organization, and echoing that, Anjali sets up her own business. Mahadev always put the family first, to the extent of marrying a 12-year-old child, within a few months of being widowered, to satisfy his father who insisted on it. Anjali too puts family first by paying off the debts incurred by her father's hospitalization and putting off her own marriage because of the resulting paucity of cash, although she is already in her mid-twenties. Mahadev knew that what he was, was partly because of his parents' determination and 'self-sacrifice' (his father's mostly since he lost his mother when young, but in other cases of the father's demise, it is equally the mother's determination and self-sacrifice) and because they had imparted to him the qualities of perseverance and discipline. Mahadev would get up at four in the morning, meditate, sing *bhajan*s (devotional songs), go for a walk, get ready, eat, go to work, return, go for a walk, wash, change, eat, do more work, and so on. Anjali's day is similarly a tight routine of well-planned work, for which she says that a day is 'just exactly long enough' to fit everything in (ibid.: 219).

There are important gender inflections to make in this comparison between Anjali and Mahadev Govind Ranade. Because Anjali is a woman and Mahadev a man, there is in fact no continuity between them, but a rupture. Until the present generation of adults in their twenties and thirties, it was unusual for a girl to be given the same care and importance regarding her formation as a boy (M. Karlekar 2000). The matter of class was, in fact, a matter of homosociality. 'Families' consisted strictly of men, with women as the links that held the generations together and as subsidiaries or hangers-on. No individual woman, some exceptions aside, was regarded as a possible actor in terms of defining class, forming class or changing class. 'Before her marriage her natal family has determined her class, and as a married woman her marital family will provide the context by which others will judge her' (Dickey 2002: 225). Thus, the middle class consists of educated men and their family members, both uneducated women and men and those educated in vernacular courses of study.

The family is differently important for the man and the woman. For the man, the family is important as the locus of his initial formation, and as the determinant of how many resources would be funnelled into the opportunities provided for him to move beyond. But it is always only the one family, of which he becomes at some point the *pater familias* and agent. For the woman, the family is important as an initial educator and with reference to its resources, and subsequently shares its importance with the family she marries into, which in turn will teach her norms until she is of age and circumstance such that she becomes their shaping force, together with her partner.[15]

The importance of the family notwithstanding, it is their schools in which the Indian middle classes have been explicitly produced. Colonial and modern schools are *founded* on an express proposition of difference. Typically private schools, they have been based, from the 1850s onwards, on a colonial model of schooling, both in terms of content and structure. The content of the teaching is predicated on the syllabi of the University of London and similar school-leaving examinations. The structure, while dependent on local Indian teachers and administrators (not to mention the non-teaching staff in their own supportive roles), is of colonial modes in its non-negotiable reliance on disciplining and self-help. The formation of the child in the school can be understood through these two lenses, of content and structure — a dualism that is purely heuristic and merges in practice.

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[15] For a quiet depiction of this process, see Shree (2000), and for a further discussion of it, N. Kumar (2007: Chapter 6).

The middle-class child is one who, through the seven generations that modern colonial education has been in place in India, understands the world as defined by the history, geography, science, mathematics, and other epistemologies of Europe, and uses English, within a spectrum of modest-to-complete fluency, for several purposes, including work. This content has served a dual purpose. It has provided 'useful, honourable, and remunerative work' from the beginning (Mayhew 1933). As times change and professions rise and fall in attractiveness (thus a thumbs-down for government service in the decade of the 2000s and a thumbs-up for management instead), school education provides a bedrock of the required skills. The content of this liberal education opened the gateway to the technology, the commerce, and the services that comprised the most valued professions.

For reasons both real (it is demanding and expensive) and symbolic (it sets the middle class 'apart from the rest of the population, mostly illiterate and poor' [Roy 1973: 58]), this education has not been seriously challenged from its inception over 150 years ago. We may be bemused to note the present demand for 'English education' in every village and small-town neighbourhood, but this is the same mindset as was to be found in the 19th century. From its inception in the 19th century, the study of English was seen as a money-making enterprise. In each generation, parents expected that their children would be formed by this education, their income would be somewhat higher than that for the previous generation, and that they would bring honour and glory to the family (Chhibbar 1968; Misra 1960; Verma 1997).

Since the new education introduced by the colonial state did not become available on a large scale for reasons of financial constraints and a weak political will, a situation developed where people could access the spoils of modernity, and subsequently of nationhood, only differentially. The middle class is not, and has never been, one. Apart from other divisions, it is divided into 'metropolitan' and 'provincial' (N. Kumar 2007: Chapter 1; LaDousa 2005). Even if the demand for education is the same all over the country, the supply is not. Indeed, the availability of 'good' English-language and English-medium education differs so radically from region to region in India that the major category of identity within the middle class should be seen to be the metropolitan–provincial division based on the level of English-language fluency (LaDousa 2006).

The family re-enters in important ways. It remains the primary site of social and cultural reproduction in provincial India, because the schools are transparently not good enough to deliver all that is promised by the new education. The importance of schooling in the provinces goes side by side, ironically, with its lack of importance, as the cultural capital of the family is drawn upon to compensate for what the school cannot provide (LaDousa 2006). Within a provincial city, then, there are significant divisions within the middle class, depending on access to inherited wealth, purity of lineage, the learning of purer vernaculars (*khari boli* Hindi against Bhojpuri in eastern UP), and social–cultural practices. Schools are always cited in principle as the main formation sites of children, but in practice are regarded, and discursively referred to, as *nowadays* (always *now*) failing the children in this task of reproduction.

In metropolitan India and wherever else the schools do deliver, there is an additional achievement of the school thanks ironically to its location within a colonial history of the dismissal of the immediate environment of the child. The child lives in a world that is inhabited by people, landscapes and processes that are comparatively foreign, and have been until recently, very foreign.[16] These imaginings of foreign people and landscapes that are imaginatively lived out, and the re-imaginings and rediscoveries of actual people and landscapes, have been the stuff of postcolonial literature for the last three decades at least. My particular position on this is to see the colonization of the imagination as long-term empowerment (N. Kumar 1992: Preface; 2007: Chapter 5), if not for the nation, then at least for the individual. Middle-class individuals who have taken their education seriously should be seen as being educated twice over. They are educated in the literal content of their curricula of studies. And they are educated in what their families have socialized them into, including epistemologies and sciences that run parallel to the formal knowledge of their schools.

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[16] Of the many objects in a distant landscape, a celebrated one comes to be the daffodil. Naipaul writes: 'There was, for instance, Wordsworth's notorious poem about the daffodil. A pretty little flower, no doubt, but we had never seen it. Could the poem have any meaning for us?' (Naipaul 1972: 23). Similarly, Lucy in Jamaica Kincaid's novel of that name, is unable to react to a well-meaning American's move to share the joy of daffodils with her: 'Mariah, mistaking what was happening to me for joy at seeing daffodils for the first time, reached out to hug me, but I moved away, and in doing that I seemed to get my voice back. I said, "Mariah, do you realize that at ten years of age I had to learn by heart a long poem about some flowers I would not see in real life until I was nineteen?"' (Kincaid 1990: 29–30).

There is also a sociological achievement of schools in metropolitan India, of whose exact epistemological status I am as yet unsure. The foreign objects — the snow, the daffodils, etc. — are processed by the child in a distanced, privatized, and therefore, ironic way. Nothing remains sacrosanct any longer. Colonial education performs the feat that sociology craves for; it reduces one's religion to incredulity and demonstrates the constructedness behind faith and belief. Another religion, or belief system, is sought to be erected in its place. But the habit or methodology of irony cannot be shaken off, and the incredulity returns with reference to the new religion. In his exposition of the sacred, Durkheim shows that the sacred is dangerous, its boundaries inexplicable: 'the reasons for any particular way of defining the sacred are embedded in the social consensus which it protects' (Douglas 1975: xv).

> The only person who holds nothing sacred is the one who has not internalized the norms of any community . . . The definition quickly identifies the sacred which in Durkheim's universe is not to be profaned: it is scientific truth . . . commitment to a non-context-dependent sense of truth (as correspondence to reality). (Ibid.: xvi)

Thanks to the mechanisms of colonial education, it is the educated middle-class Western world that accepts science and the rationality that goes with it as sacred and true; the Indian metropolitan child arguably holds nothing sacred.

Since that is strictly speaking not possible, the ground is ready for an ideology to be planted. Speaking to people over 60, those who had retired from government service and the professions of law, management, medicine, and the arts, I found a pattern in their rediscovery of the self. In one way it was the same pattern as the one followed by the 19th- and early 20th-century intelligentsia. A rigorous course of study and success in school was followed by a glorious, or at least a satisfactory, career. Then, at some point, came the realization that the spiritual self was starved. This could take different forms, from condemning specific teachers who had guided the person as a child to study Western philosophy or English literature, to a re-education in one's 'own' language, philosophy, history, or arts, based on the model of the study of Western languages, histories and arts. Mahesh Chandra, an anglophile High Court judge, turned to a translation of the Upanishads from Sanskrit to English in his last 20 years after retirement. Mahesh Verma, a retired railway officer, turned to a study of Coomaraswamy and his principles of Indian art. His home also came to be transfigured in typical ways. Cassettes of Vedic hymns were played in the morning as his large family of four sons and their wives and children assembled for breakfast, and Mr Verma became conspicuously more of a Hindu *pater familias* on a mould rediscovered from books on 'ancient India'. It was as if there was a 'need' for a spiritual identity, which the irony of colonial/modern education and its immersion in a foreign world developed into a hunger. This was satisfied until a generation ago by a discovery of India and its historical and spiritual wealth. Now it is satisfied by the consumption and regurgitation of a packaged Hinduism.[17]

The agency of the child and the possible failures of the middle-class child

The third and major interference by the family in the formation of the child in the school is through further tutoring and coaching in the very subjects learnt in school. If we were to follow the child home from school, as it were, we would find that the family is anxiously awaiting the return of the child, so that they can supervise the child's homework. We need far more research on the subject, but it is almost certain that the socialization patterns from infancy onwards, the nature of nurture and caregiving, the narratives taught to and expected from children, the degree of attachment and autonomy practised, all go to underscore the discipline inculcated in children, and demanded by, the school. Again, this is based on the *difference* deliberately cultivated by the middle class between its upbringing of the child and a working-class upbringing. 'Child labour' is a symbol of this difference and is presented as the obverse of 'education'. Thus, a middle-class child is knowable and definable because it is the *working-class child* who typically helps in the work of the household: grazing cows or sheep (Gold 2002), running errands for elders (N. Kumar 2007), taking care of siblings, and doing all this at the expense of concentrating on school education. The discourse of the middle-class family states that even if the working-class child were to try to become upwardly mobile by getting a school education, he or she simply would not be able to. The failure of the child in school is therefore the failure of the child's family, just as the success of a child logically, and implicitly, depends on the family.

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[17] This all too brief discussion needs to be fleshed out elsewhere, including with more attention given to the gendered dimension of the process. The 'Hinduization' of the middle class, if such is what it is, is also the involuntary result of the progressive absence of women from the roles of full-time mothers and indigenous educators that they played in the last six to seven generations.

But one of the sad things to discover about the middle class is how in practically every family there is an instance, or several instances, of failure, and how this comes to be interpreted to reflect on the child rather than the family. I would call this the dual discourse of the child and childhood in India. At one level, childhood is unmarked and undifferentiated, and children are theoretically the same in that they are malleable and formable. Education is an alchemy that can produce wonders. It can change a person intellectually, socially, psychologically, morally, and emotionally. Fiction in Indian languages, particularly, discloses how the experience of education produces a new breed of people, the schooled or educated, who are marked as different from the unschooled or uneducated. They look different and smell different. They relate to their bodies in different ways — using cream or lotion instead of oil, for instance — as also to spaces, and to other people. This is of as much importance and as centrally a matter of investment by the family and formation for the child (or youth) as is the passing of academic tests (N. Kohli 2001; R. Srivastava 1994).[18]

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[18] I do not go into it here, but a separate study would reveal the same discourse at work in the world of films produced in Mumbai. For instance, consider the trope of the businessman sending his son abroad to become a fantastic new being: in *Virasat*, the father says, '*maine tumhe Gwalior bheja, London bheja, ki tum parh likh kar hamko jina sikhaoge*' (I sent you to Gwalior, to London, so that you would get educated and teach us in turn how to live). This often represents bungling on the part of the parents because

What, then, of the child who does not make it? What of the older brother as in Premchand's *Bare Bhai Sahab* who fails in class again and again and will therefore never attain proper middle-classhood? In story after story, fictitious and ethnographic (the historical record is almost erased), the same plot is revealed: out of several siblings, at least one (and often all but one!) cannot perform in the prescribed ways and live up to the expectations of the family. He (male as a rule) does not manage to pass exams and complete assignments. He cannot sit down to study. But of all the cases we know, Rabindranath Tagore's is the only one in which the child is able to look back on his troubled experiences not as an inability on his part but as something that was the result of an over oppressive system. Rabindranath's family was rich and eccentric and does not quite fill the criteria of middle-classness. It is useful, however, to recognize that he was personally perspicacious enough to spot the problem, whereas in every other case the discourse is one of the individual child as essentially unamenable to being taught. The failed child may, in the best of cases, be loved and pitied, but he is explicitly labelled a failure.

The majority of middle-class children today, as the numbers are burgeoning and the possible openings for them contracting, are in a grey zone between success and failure. They have not actually failed in school, but they are not marked out as successes either. For them, there are the coaching institutes. Coaching institutes are largely the definers of middle-classness. When the career possibilities exclude manual labour on the one hand and high-capital trade and business on the other, then what remains are professional and government jobs. If the Indian Administrative and Foreign Services were the highest-ranking professions in the recent past, today the most sought after are the management, medical and engineering professions. For each of these, there is a training course, and for entrance to each of these courses there is an examination. For the examination, there is a course of study, to train for which there is an institution called a coaching institute. Indeed, we do not hear

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the son returns a selfish cad, who can moreover not adjust any more. He laughs at, and looks down on, Indian customs and wants a different way of life. As an interesting corollary, we might note that in some films where the educated son is a good human being, nationalist and ready to serve loyally, the locus of his education is not specified (for instance, *Swades*).

as much about the actual engineering, medical and management professions as we do about the institutes that enable entrance to the training courses for these professions.

Coaching institutes were originally set up as a career option by educated young men who found themselves faced with a dearth of employment opportunities. 'Coaching' or 'tutoring' ranks high in the list of respectable occupations, as part of the larger set of educational activities that are part intellectual, part service, only partially a profession and partially a vocation. Tutoring was a part of the system from the earliest days of English education in India, and the first graduate Mahadev Govind Ranade himself coached his juniors. Annapa Vithal Baliga's case is exemplary. He was born in a South Kanara village in 1903, and lost his father when he was two years old. According to T.M.A. Pai, an illustrious educator and Baliga's teacher for one year:

> He was easily the best in the class. One lesson was enough for him and he could easily repeat the whole thing. His record in all the examinations was a very proud achievement for any student. He was loved by all his classmates and he used to hold for them special classes and see that all of them were able to pass with him, and his life was most exemplary. (Bakaya 1991: 5)

The story of failure emerges clearly in the following interview, put together as a composite of several conversations between 'Us' and 'T' or the principal administrator in the coaching institute:

Us: Why does this coaching centre exist? What is it for?

T: For me, there was a lack of choice. After graduating I found there were no jobs in marketing and no jobs in the civil services. Nowadays, people voluntarily choose coaching jobs, but not then. Today it is the most remunerative of professions. Can you guess the kind of remuneration?

Us: Hmm . . . 10,000–20,000 rupees a month?

T: 6 lakh per session [600,000 rupees for approximately eight to 10 months]. A teacher could get up to 6 lakh. We charge ₹ 20,000 per student per subject. Others charge ₹ 50,000.

Us: Can the students pay this much?

T: No, undoubtedly they cannot.

Us: So, who are these students? What is their profile?

T: See, in metros if students do professional degrees, they can get jobs. In [backward areas like] Purvanchal [eastern Uttar Pradesh] there are no career opportunities, except as labourers and in government service. By joining coaching centres, students try to qualify for national exams such as the JEE [Joint Entrance Examination].

Us: Is that a good prospect?

T: Well, it is very controversial. The exams are for the IITs [Indian Institutes of Technology]. There are seven in all: Kanpur, Delhi, Bombay, Chennai, Rourkela, Guwahati, Kharagpur. From next year Banaras will also have one. In 1972, when the Joint Entrance was started, rural and urban students were not so different. After 1990, there has come to be a huge gap. You will not have a rural student, unless his parents are also graduates. Why? No, it is not that cities have become so advanced. It is because the rural areas have become more backward.

Us: What kind of backwardness exactly?

T: Backwardness of the school base. If students had to depend only on the base of their school teaching, hardly 8,000 out of 8 lakh [800,000] students would pass.

Us: What is the solution?

T: The base in primary education must be strong. For primary education a missionary zeal is needed.

Us: And in higher classes?

T: In the higher secondary [division] teachers are very unqualified. In the plus-two classes, no one takes a class.

Us: Why is it so bad?

T: No one bothers.

Us: The coaching centres change this, do they?

T: The trouble is: everyone is studying somewhere, but no one will be able to do it. In my class itself eight have run away, one I chased away.

Us: They have difficulty in studying, but they are not aware of it?

T: They think they know . . . [but] 98 per cent of the guardians are indifferent. 99 per cent of the teachers are indifferent. 99.9 per cent of the students are indifferent. They simply think, '*tayari kari; dekhi ka ho . . .*' [Let us prepare a little. Let us see what will happen].

They have no real dreams, no aims, no expectations. The majority deteriorate further after starting coaching.

Us: What is the solution?

T: A route is needed to some real expectations. The base in primary [education] must be strong.

Us: How should we build it?

T: Well, my background is different. I have five years' experience in this; I have a foundation. I focus on the 'maximum output' in the huge syllabus. There is no need to complete the syllabus. I have gone through the difficulties and learnt.

Us: So what is your method?

T: Lecture. Then test them on the same thing to see how much they have grasped from that same day's lecture. People do not stress basic grasping enough. We are also trying to bring everything from a 'theoretical' to a 'pictorial' base. The best way to learn is through 'hearing power'. We think that everything is best done in the classroom. We have no home assignments.

Us: So students are not doomed to fail?

T: We give out revision sheets and daily practice problem sheets. Other coaching centres are interested in making money. They are qualitatively poor.

Us: Why are colleges not as good as coaching institutes?

T: Because teachers want to make money.

Us: Since when has this been the case?

T: Seven or eight years or more . . . We do warn the parents about the truth, that their children cannot cope, cannot manage. But they insist: '*bachcha mehnat karega, kar lega*' [the child will work hard, he will manage].

Us: What *is* the solution?

T: Primary-level studies should be the focus. Primary-level studies are [of] a very low quality (*ghatia hai*).

Interviews with coaching centre heads and teachers illustrate very dramatically that the problem is not one of individuals or their level of effort, but a structural one. It starts at the level of primary schooling. The base of the students, specifically in mathematics and English, is very poor, thanks to the poverty of primary schooling.

After that, the student can never really excel. After high school, dreaming of a career that is stable and rewarding, the student looks around to evaluate her/his choices. There are very few and the dominant ones lead to careers in engineering, medicine and management, followed by the central and provincial services. These need training; the training needs an entrance exam; the entrance exams need coaching.

The interviews, then, reflect the coaching centres' own conflicting points of view. According to their own analysis, the majority of the students — even if we take the 99.9 per cent estimate as an exaggeration — are so poorly trained that they will not be successful in their wishful dreaming of careers in engineering, medicine, or management. Yet, the coaching centres claim that they are not cheating students by holding out a promise of success. They provide, they argue, state-of-the-art teaching of the chosen subjects, take personal care, and see through their responsibility towards the students to the end.

Unique Tutorials, a coaching centre in Varanasi, tells its students: 'We will be conducting nearly 24 tests including the practice tests on pattern of various exams . . . Unique Tutorials is conducting these tests in association with Positive Feedback . . . Your Feedback will be appreciated . . . Better ideas are Always Welcome [*sic*]'.[19] Its example clarifies the procedure of all coaching centres. They make detailed syllabi, conduct frequent tests, give feedback to students, hold revision classes and 'make-up classes', use materials and images in teaching (as required), and combine lectures with discussions. In short, they seem to be aiming at deliberate and purposeful good teaching, and their effort seems to be directed at making students feel that they are getting their money's worth.

The students I talked to regarding their experience in coaching for JEE, PMT and CAT exams (Joint Entrance Examination, Pre-Medical Tests and Combined Aptitude Test, respectively) — concurred with regard to one aspect: they were clear that these exams were simply 'hot' things — '*charm hai*' (they are attractive) — not indicating that students wanted in fact to do engineering, medicine, or management as their chosen occupations for the rest of their lives. Some of the exams, such as the JEE, were also regarded as 'nice', that is, challenging for ambitious students, with *many more* facts and interesting questions than the syllabi of Classes XI and XII had. So, if a student was good, confident and ambitious, he or she would naturally want to compete in these exams. In all schools and colleges, JEE and CAT were like buzz words: 'Who is preparing for CAT?' If you were popular, you were studying for CAT.

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[19] Surendra Patel, 'Dear Students!', photocopied handout, Unique Tutorials, B 32/112 Saket Nagar, Varanasi 221005, 2006.

Apart from being driven by this desire to be challenged by 'nice' exams and to prove their worth (and the realization that it may be a fruitless exercise in any case), students were also clear about the fact that there was a significant difference between coaching centres and schools and colleges. Their views coincided with those of the coaching centres. The teachers of these centres charged a lot (but professed to be uninterested in money), and claimed instead that school teachers were out to make money. But the significant thing was the difference in quality. Coaching centre teachers felt that they knew what they had to deliver, and they delivered it. They believed that school teachers had not done an adequate job in preparing students.

Students also thought that coaching centres were vastly superior to schools and colleges. To an observer these coaching centres would seem like rows of auditoriums with none of the pleasures that a real campus could provide with its liberal studies, socialization and extra-curricular activities. But we must remember that in most cases there are no activities and close to no studies in a high school. In coaching centres, as my informant Juhi said, 'You can ask, you can get help. In school you can't ask. No one bothers. My coaching teacher has a real skeleton. He makes xeroxes. He teaches very practically'. 'That is how it should be in school', suggest I. '*Bas, yahi to nahi hota hai*' (That is exactly what does not happen), said Juhi assertively '*nahin to kya zarurat hoti coaching ki*?' (Otherwise why would we need coaching?).

It is tempting to conclude by saying that it is all about teaching. One is tempted to critique teachers harshly, for being unprofessional at best, and for being violent and destructive at worst. Yet, the truth lies not in any wilful failure on their part but in a larger problem. If teachers are recruited raw without any training, there is a ready explanation for their lack of ideas. But if they have a teaching degree, we have to understand that degree and the education that went into it as being a part of the same pool of problems that Indian education is beset with. Whether they have a degree or not, what is remarkable is that a public discourse is missing on the subject of the lack of pedagogic techniques in Indian education. The discourse is missing at every level, most conspicuously in the so-called 'Education' supplements of the major national newspapers, filled, not with sophisticated discussions of the problems of Indian education, but with thin fact-filled reports on schemes of study and coaching. Teachers are only one cog in this giant machine that daily fails students.

A new bifurcation between teachers, observed from interactions with coaching centre teachers, has to be highlighted. These are teachers who feel they are successful: they prepare, they have plans, resources and time to give to students. They charge highly and give satisfaction. They are part of a totally market-oriented system, and as far as we can tell, on the surface everyone is satisfied: the guardians and students are paying up but getting what they want, and the teachers are earning well and are happy to provide what is required.

The reflective among them are aware that their students are not really going to succeed. These students are happy to at least be allowed to prepare for competitive examinations and to compete in them. This itself is an achievement of sorts. Some students sit sequentially for PMT, JEE and CAT, the careers being ranked roughly in this order (medicine, engineering and management) on the basis of the difficulty of studies and the salaries and the job satisfaction that ensue. So, for a medical job you have to study the longest and hardest, and for a management one, the least. But in management you can get almost any salary you ask for. Engineering ranks second after management, but its entrance exam is very tough, again, second after CAT. So students play and gossip around with all this information and with tales, tall and ordinary. They feel special as long as they are preparing. Their guardians take loans or spend from their savings and also feel special, waiting to see what the results will be. Yet all statistics show, and in the heart of the province people know, that practical success is very rare. Most wake up to it gradually, and then resign themselves to other jobs.

Those who are insiders to the whole subject are aware that somewhere, soon, there will be a crash. The vast majority of students are simply not capable of performing in the ways they are expected to. Certainly, it is the teacher's responsibility to make them do so, but teachers in turn feel trapped by the unrealistic affiliating and examining rules of the examining boards. The problem is created by the shortage of quality schools and colleges. And the problem persists because of the lack of self-awareness in the middle-class family about the distance between its aspirations for the child and the nature of teaching experienced by her/him. It is the overall failure of the middle class to confront its own needs, both in the sites of the family and of the school.

The failures are multiple. Not only does the family not require of the school that its needs for the child's future be provided for, it has not yet articulated what these needs are clearly enough to work towards them. In the colonial period, there was a challenge that the newly educated trained themselves to meet: a repression of domestic socialization in progressive cooperation with the needs of the school, a gendering of parenting and full-time service by women for the adequate reproduction of the child as a principled, educated, successful middle-class person. In the present, there is nowhere even near enough an articulation of the gross and painful experiences of children caught between the grind of the school that prepares poorly, the coaching centre that cannot build further on an inadequate base, and the family that has insufficient resources, now including even gendered service, to support and guide the child.

10 The Middle Classes at Home

Seemin Qayum and *Raka Ray*

In the sitting room of an old, slightly crumbling house in south Kolkata, whose faded walls are adorned with framed pictures of Rabindranath Tagore and her deceased parents, Mrinalini, an artist in her sixties, considers her servant-keeping practices. She has regaled us with stories about the servants of her youth, and now she turns the conversation to herself and what it means to have live-in servants — Mrinalini's two servants, Arjun and Saraswati, have been with her for many years. She homes in on what has become one of the major themes in our study of Kolkata's culture of servitude: the making and maintaining of distinction. Mrinalini says:

> In my heart, I'm sure I'm feudal. I would not want Arjun to sit on my bed. I don't mind him sitting at my table, but as yet I would not like him to sit on my bed. We watch TV together, and I make him watch Discovery channel. Now he is addicted to it. Before that he would watch cricket. This is a promotion because we are both watching together, and he is sitting on a *mora* [stool] rather than on the floor. When we watch TV, I sit on the bed, Arjun sits on a mora, and Saraswati always sits on the floor. Two days ago, Saraswati went and got a mora for herself. I was happy. It is good. I would love to say that it is all equal and democratic; it's not really, it's all on the way to.

In common with several other employers in our study, Mrinalini self-consciously contrasts 'feudal' with 'modern' democratic ways of being. An astute observer and thinker of social practices, Mrinalini knows that her relationships with servants are uncommon: She is unusual in allowing Arjun to sit at her table — although they would not eat together — and in her conception of domestic equality the members of the household, employers and servants alike, sit on the same level, if not on the bed then on a chair, and watch television together.

Mrinalini's description of shared television viewing reflects two key potentialities within the Bengali middle-class home. First, it reflects the gradual erasure of spatial distinction between the servant body and the employer body as the servant moves up from the floor, an erasure which nevertheless remains incomplete.[1] Second, it indicates an iteration of *bhadra* (middle-class) civilizing reform — Mrinalini's assumption that Arjun has been 'improved' by his contact with 'modern' science via educational television recalls earlier colonial and elite nationalist civilizational projects. In Bourdieu's terms:

> The nature against which culture is here constructed is nothing other than what is 'popular', 'low', 'vulgar', 'common'. This means that anyone who wants to 'succeed in life' must pay for his accession to everything which defines truly humane humans by a change of nature, a 'social promotion' experienced as an ontological promotion, a process of 'civilization'. (Bourdieu 1984: 251)

Distinction is at the crux of class formation and, as such, of our argument in this essay: Classes come into being not only through production and consumption in the social world outside the household, but through labour and intimate practices within the home. Moreover, in societies with long histories of domestic servitude, the relations of domestic servitude offer a lens to view the constitution of the self and the society. We argue specifically that (*i*) the Indian middle classes were constituted and constitute themselves through domestic practices in the home; (*ii*) the institution of domestic servitude is intimately tied to the self-conscious evolution of a modern Indian middle class and elite, and that changes in the middle classes are reflected in changes in servant-management techniques; and (*iii*) class production and reproduction are embedded in a *culture of servitude* in which relationships of domination/ subordination, dependency and inequality are normalized and permeate both the domestic and public spheres.[2] Domestic servitude, then, must be seen as an institution that not only produces cleanliness, meals and child care, but also produces class. Inhabiting and managing households with servants, the Indian middle classes reproduce as normal an unequal society in which groups 'naturally' divide along class lines and in which lower classes naturally serve the higher classes.[3]

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[1] Servants themselves understand this well; several of them told us that they would never sit on a chair in the house in which they worked because doing so would leave them open to insult.

[2] A culture of servitude is akin to Bourdieu's *habitus*, 'a structuring structure, which organizes practices and the perception of practices' (Bourdieu 1984: 170). Different cultures of servitude are shaped by particular historical configurations of economic/gender/spatial and often race/caste structural inequalities that traverse the domestic and public spheres. Thus, we would expect the identity of servants, the functions they perform and their relations with employers to vary across cultures of servitude.

In discussions about the production and reproduction of the middle classes, scholars have tended to focus on the mechanisms of material and symbolic inclusion and exclusion in institutions of the public sphere — politics, education, media — to understand how these classes maintain their dominance. Leela Fernandes and Patrick Heller (2006), for example, argue that the middle classes practice certain methods of exclusion in the civil sphere and politics that reaffirm their supremacy while ensuring that the boundaries of separation from the lower classes remain continually drawn. Amita Baviskar's (2002) work on bourgeois environmentalism articulates the new exclusionary politics of city beautification campaigns. Nita Kumar's article in this volume examines exclusionary elite and middle-class modes of schooling.[4] Our work contributes to this literature by stressing the labour practices and relations in the home, which make it a crucial site of class production and reproduction.

Studying the middle classes at home

Historians of South Asia have elucidated the ways in which debates over domesticity arose simultaneously with the creation of a middle class in the late 19th century. Indeed, Tanika Sarkar (2001: 38) has pointed out that the debates about the forms domestic life should take were very publicly played out in colonial India. Partha Chatterjee (1993) has also shown that for the Indian middle-class man, the home came to substitute for the world outside, constituting the only sphere over which he had any control. In one of the very few books on domestic workers in India, Swapna Banerjee argues that the new Bengali middle class in the late

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[3] Rachel Sherman's (2007) study of guests and workers in US luxury hotels shows how luxury service is produced and consumed, and through it, class inequality.

[4] For a fascinating account of the creation of national elites through schooling, see S. Srivastava (1998).

19th century articulated its class identity through a conscious distancing from the 'other' — 'the social lower classes' (S. Banerjee 2004: 3). We, in turn, employ a historically informed ethnographic analysis to consider class formation and reproduction through domestic practices a century after the Bengali middle classes emerged.

The home, household and family are by now widely recognized for their role in the production and reproduction of gender inequality, but much less so of class and other inequalities. It is only with the recent work on paid domestic work that the home is increasingly being seen as the site not only of gender but also of class inequality (Adams and Dickey 2000; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001; Rollins 1985; Romero 1992). Writing about Victorian England, Leonore Davidoff (1995) argues that social divisions are most clearly revealed in the reproductive sphere, and thus the household should constitute a primary unit of analysis. In particular, paid domestic work within the household bridges the private–public divide, bringing social relations of power (class, caste, race/ethnicity, gender) into the household, and mirroring and reproducing these relations within the domestic unit. Feminist theorists such as Rosaldo and Lamphere (1974), Tilly and Scott (1978), Barrett (1980), Hartmann and Treiman (1981), Hochschild (1989), and Barrett and McIntosh (1991) firmly established the links between power, domination and conflict in the private and the public spheres. These theorists analyzed the relations between husband and wife and between parents and children in the household as a means of demonstrating the structural link between capitalism and patriarchy and problematizing 'women's work', both unpaid housework and paid employment outside of the home. Once the household is opened up as a site of unequal power, it becomes possible to open it up even further to consider it as a site of unequal class and caste relations by bringing into the analysis relations between family members and dependent labour paid to work within the home, that is, servants. Kumkum Sangari recognizes the centrality of the household in the production of multiple inequalities: 'Since the household is a space for the daily production and recreation of social inequality not only on gender but also on class and caste lines, the cross-cutting class relations *inside* households would themselves severally mediate the ideological translations of labour' (Sangari 2001: 292). Here it bears emphasizing that labour performed by the women of the household has a very different meaning from labour which is supervised by them but performed by poor and/or low-caste men and women.

Mary Douglas (1966) and Leonore Davidoff (1995) have helped clarify what makes domestic labour distinctive for class constitution and class boundaries. The core activities of domestic work — cooking, cleaning and child care — involve turning the raw into the cooked, dirt into cleanliness, and disorder into order. In Davidoff's words,

> In the most basic sense, housework is concerned with creating and maintaining order in the immediate environment, making meaningful patterns of activities, people and materials. The most important part in the creation of such an order is the separating out of the basic constituents and making clear the boundaries between them. (Davidoff 1995: 75)

The ability to be free from having to maintain these boundaries is, Davidoff argues, a sign of one's power and privilege. That is, to be middle-class is to distance oneself from work on the boundaries of purity and pollution. To be middle-class and male is to remove oneself even further from such boundary maintenance. Thus, it may be said that the Indian middle classes are distinguished from the classes below them by virtue of being both actually and ceremonially removed from boundary-maintaining labour.

Modernity and the Indian middle classes

We know, thanks to historians and sociologists such as Satish Deshpande, about the protagonism of the Indian middle classes in bringing India into being as a modern nation. India was to take its place in the world as a newly independent, democratic nation state, and was, above all, to be modern. Even as the middle classes were assumed to be speaking on behalf of the new nation, they were assiduously engaged in particular projects of modernity alongside the larger national projects of industrial and technological development. Such an engagement was pursued in many newly independent nations precisely because they had been consigned, as it were, to the 'waiting room' of modernity, perhaps indefinitely (Chakrabarty 2000: 9). But modernity, as Sudipta Kaviraj (2000: 137) argues, was not written on a 'clean slate'; thus, modernity can never be homogeneous and takes on, in fact, multiple meanings in different historical spaces. In the Indian context, it has its particular sources and trajectories, and an ambivalent relationship to the notions of modernity in Europe and the US.[5] Indeed, what is thought of as traditional in the sense of predating or being antithetical to modernity can usefully be seen as one of the inventions of modernity, and the battle between tradition and modernity itself as a product of modernity. To be 'modern' in postcolonial India is to align oneself with projects such as development, science, progress, invention, and discovery; in turn, to be 'traditional' means to react negatively to such aspirations to modernity, to perhaps reject the terms of the debate, yet often make alternative claims couched in the very language of modernity.[6]

We wish to stress two points regarding the debate about modernity. First, while the aspiration to modernity is of great significance to the Indian middle classes for whom it is a self-conscious project in this globalizing age, our interest is not in the existence or non-existence of modernity per se, but in the power of the *idea* of modernity. In other words, we use 'modernity' — and 'feudalism' — as folk categories of considerable power. We note also that the modernity imagined and desired in India is both similar to and yet distinct from the imagined modernity of the North. Second, projects of modernity are not limited to the public sphere and the institutions of education, politics and the economy but, crucially, reach the home as well. From the late 19th century onwards, social reform projects, initiated by both colonial authorities and Indians, targeted the 'modernization' of Indian society and particularly aimed for 'improvement' in the domestic sphere. Such domestic reforms, including the passage of legislation regulating marriage and allowing widows to remarry and the establishment of fields of inquiry and teaching such as 'home science', attempted to introduce the so-called modern principles of management to the home.[7] The home, it was asserted, was inextricably linked to the nation, and the scientific and rational management of the home was thus linked to the creation of a scientific and rational nation. Given this history, it is not surprising that today's purportedly modern practices of the home matter to the Indian middle classes.

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[5] In the debates around modernity, scholars such as S. N. Eisenstadt, Sudipta Kaviraj and Dipesh Chakrabarty have argued that Marx, Weber and Durkheim assumed that modernity arose from one principle — for Marx, capitalist commodity production; for Weber, rationalization; for Durkheim, individual reason — first in the West and then gradually spread to those parts of the world that came to approximate the West (Chakrabarty 2000; Eisenstadt 2000; Kaviraj 2000).

[6] An example is the debate around ayurvedic medicine and yoga carried out in the Indian media in 2006, with particular reference to the argument between a leader of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPI(M), Brinda Karat, and popular guru Baba Ramdev on the cancer-curing properties of yoga. Asserting that yoga can indeed cure AIDS, Baba Ramdev has called for scientific research on the subject (Suchandana Gupta, 'Yoga Can Cure AIDS: Ramdev', *The Times of India*, 20 December 2006).

Any analysis of servant-keeping practices in the middle classes involves an entanglement with ideas of modernity, as Mrinalini's anecdote made evident, for two reasons: the anxiety over the juxtaposition of paid domestic work and modernity revealed in the global literature on the one hand, and the relationship of the Indian middle classes to modernity on the other. Writing about the US in the 1970s, Lewis Coser (1973) predicted that domestic work as an occupation was doomed to obsolescence.[8] Subsequent history may have proved him wrong, but his claim about obsolescence was based on an assumed incompatibility between domestic servitude and modernity. Much of the contemporary popular literature on domestic work both in the US and elsewhere reflects the unease with the 'return' of an occupation that does not readily align with notions of work in a modern, democratic world. These popular books and magazine articles provide helpful tips to new or first-time employers on how to manage this unease, how to be firm with one's domestic worker, and what tasks it is appropriate to ask her to perform. And thus we see a veritable industry of advice books — not unlike the advice books that were issued in the late 19th century in countries such as the US, Britain and India — meant to teach employers how best to manage their households and their domestic help.[9]

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[7] In her intriguing article on the institution of home science in the Madras presidency, Mary Hancock writes: 'Home Science treated the home as a laboratory where family and society could be physically and morally improved, but it also furnished a conceptual laboratory where Indian women, influenced by Gandhian notions of self-help as well as by Eurowestern feminisms, sought to create a discourse of both nationalist autonomy and gender equality' (Hancock 2001: 872).

[8] See also George Stigler (1946), who reported falling demand for servants in the 1930s due to smaller family sizes and greater reliance on household appliances.

The appearance of these popular books in the American context highlights the assumed contradiction between being modern and being an employer of domestics. Nevertheless, it is clear that more and more people who can afford it in fact hire (cheap) labour to clean up after themselves and to look after their children (thus corroborating Ruth Milkman et al.'s [1998] argument that the single largest determinant of the extent of paid domestic work in any location is the extent of inequality there). The point of these advice books is to assure contemporary employers that it is fine to hire a nanny or a housekeeper, as long as one is able to manage them appropriately. In contemporary India, unlike in the US, paid domestic work is seen as being perfectly in keeping with modernity, and thus no justification is needed for the hiring of servants. The issue is not whether to hire servants but how to manage them, and in this, employers can be distinguished in terms of their household- and servant-management practices.

Given the Indian middle classes' long history with employing domestic servants, the management of servants is folded into the management of the household. There are, in effect, for Indian middle-class employers, two social imaginaries at work with regard to servant-management practices — the feudal and the modern. We borrow the term 'social imaginaries' from Charles Taylor to connote the ways in which ordinary people imagine their social existence, their relationships with others, as well as the 'deeper normative notions and images' that underlie the expectations they have from others (C. Taylor 2004: 23).[10] Employer social imaginaries thus encompass a social order where classes interact in specific ways and in specific places.

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[9] 'Many of us feel awkward hiring domestic help, especially if we didn't grow up with any', write Carlton and Meyer (1999: 33), the authors of *The Nanny Book: The Smart Parents Guide to Hiring, Firing, and Every Sticky Situation in Between*. For colonial India, see Flora A. Steel and G. Gardiner (1909) and Constance E. Gordon (1913); for Victorian England, the classic was *Mrs. Beeton's Guide to Household Management* (Beeton 2000 [1860]).

[10] The social imaginary 'supposes . . . a wider grasp of our whole predicament: how we stand to each other, how we got to where we are, how we relate to other groups and so on' (C. Taylor 2004: 25).

We use the term 'feudal' because employers, and, in fact, most middle- and upper-class people in Kolkata, constantly use the term to summon up the past, in contrast to the 'modern' present. The feudal imaginary refers to a lost colonial world in which the employers' income was from land rents derived from rural estates, and several generations of a family lived together in one house, usually under the authority of a patriarch. Ideally, the income from the land was enough to keep the family in comfort. The servants of such a family also came from the land, that is, from villages associated with those rural estates and from tenant families who would work for the employer family for generations. The relations between the employer and the servant were based on loyalty and obligation, and the employer acted as a patron to the servant and his family. The servant in this picture lived with the family and was typically male, the quintessential family retainer. The feudal imaginary is both an ever-present source of nostalgia and a mode of being which the middle classes believe properly belongs to the past.

The modern imaginary encompasses the universe that employers believe, for better or for worse, they *ought* to inhabit today — a social order still taking shape, whose contours are being uneasily but pragmatically filled — a universe where employers no longer live off the land but are employed by the state or private enterprises, and live in flats rather than big houses. The joint families of the past are nucleated, and relationships with the servant, now typically female, live-out, and often part-time, are based on the wage contract system. It is in the ideological and metaphorical interplay between the social imaginaries of the feudal and the modern that the relationships between the employers and the servants in Kolkata's culture of servitude have developed.

In the rest of this essay we locate Kolkata's evolving culture of servitude in the colonial and contemporary urban formation, and present a comparison of two generations of middle-class employers and their inhabitation of the three premises of the culture of servitude that we have defined: first, servants are essential to a well-run and well-kept household; second, servants are a 'part of the family' and bound to it by ties of affection, loyalty and dependence — what we call the 'rhetoric of love'; and third, servants constitute a class with its own distinctive lifestyles, desires and habits (to which we have alluded in the opening section on Mrinalini).

Employers' modes of grappling with the changes wrought in the culture of servitude by larger economic and social transformations as well as by internal dynamics allow for a reading of a their re-imagination and reorganization of middle-classness.

The spatial logics of Kolkata

During the colonial period, the city of Calcutta (now Kolkata) was effectively divided into two parts: the North, inhabited by the old native elite, many of whose members derived their income from the zamindari system, and characterized as the indigenous part of the city; and the South, which was the site of the colonial state apparatus as well as the part that housed the residences of the English. The city developed on the zamindari village model, with great houses surrounded by bazaars and *basti*s (slums) whose residents provided in-house or readily available domestic service. In fact, the first rural migrants to the city came to work as domestic servants in the posh districts of the English, and settled in bastis within walking distance of the opulent colonial mansions (Chakravorty 2000; Sarkar 2002; Sinha 1978). Thus, from its very inception, the city of Calcutta was built around the assumption of the necessity of a service class.

Because the British capitalist system radiated from Calcutta, the city was at the centre of the orbit of the production and circulation of goods and services (Mukherjee 1977). Many emerging *bhadralok* moved into the city during the first four decades of the 19th century, the elite into brick buildings and the workers into huts. As the city became more prosperous, the former structures replaced the latter, although the city remained one of palaces and hovels.[11] Indeed, the older slum areas of the city were settled into some 150 years ago; the residents had *thika* tenancy and little fear of eviction, leading to continuous occupation by several generations.[12]

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[11] During the five-year period of 1822–27, 6,000 huts disappeared and over 3,000 new brick buildings were erected (Mukherjee 1977: 36).

[12] In the thika system, large land-owners rented plots of land to tenants, known as *thika* tenants, who in turn built numerous huts on their plots to sublet to workers and migrants to the city and their families. The thika tenant rented the land but owned the buildings on it (Ramaswamy and Chakravarti 1997).

Late 20th-century attempts to reshape the architectural profile of the city by eliminating the slums from which the middle classes draw their servants have signally failed. The Salt Lake City development in the 1970s was designed as middle- to upper-middle class housing, 'with signs of visible poverty removed', so there were no bastis and few accessible servants, creating a 'servant problem' for the newly suburban elite (Chakravorty 2000: 64). More recently, with the development of New Towns, 7,000 housing units called service villages, meant to house the displaced persons, have been incorporated. In the view of some observers, these are in fact mini slums, planned to avoid the servant problem of Salt Lake. Similar enclaves have been developed throughout eastern and southeastern Kolkata for the new globalized elite involved in the high technology and financial sectors.

The West Bengal government has put forward the idea of public–private partnership models that depend on cross subsidies through which a percentage of the apartments in the new developments are designated for the poor or economically weaker sectors and are made available at a price fixed by the government.[13] Property developer Animesh Sen, however, added a sobering note in his estimate:

> You would need at least a monthly income of ₹10,000 to be able to live in Kolkata, assuming a family of four, plus parents. People who earn less than ₹10,000 cannot live in Kolkata proper and must go out to the suburbs. These people are culturally middle-class but financially lower middle-class. (Ray and Qayum 2009: 42)

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[13] Gautam Deb, Minister for Housing and Public Health Engineering, commented that the expansion of the city had never been faster, especially in the rapidly developing suburbs. He said that Kolkata must avoid the mistakes Mumbai made during its real estate boom when property prices skyrocketed, resulting in its becoming one of the costliest cities in the country: 'That is exactly why the state government has decided to be a player in the market . . . You can get an apartment of your own no matter what your budget is'. The Minister gave the example of a flat that would cost ₹84,000, and another flat in the same project with a price tag of ₹ 210,000 (Gautam Deb, 'Basic Instinct', *Times of India* [Kolkata], 18 January 2006).

What we see in the beginning of the 21st century, therefore, is a highly unequal spatial configuration in which elite re-appropriation and transformation of urban space is enabled by a 'public–private partnership' that consigns the lower middle classes to new developments outside of the city proper and new poorer migrants to 'unrehabilitated' slums and squatter settlements. In other words, globalizing Kolkata is superimposed upon a colonial city of palaces and hovels.

Domestic spatial logics: From the big house to the flat

With skyrocketing land prices and increasing population density over the past decades, a conspicuous element of the city's spatial transformation has been the demolition of detached family homes in favour of multi-storied apartment buildings. While this has taken place in many of the world's major cities, the advent of towers of flats has been relatively recent in Kolkata, and certainly so within the lifetime of many of its middle- and upper-class residents. Despite the shift to apartment living, the 'big house' remains the defining trope for contemporary conventional and commonplace understandings of domestic servitude. The decline of the big house and the rise of modern apartment buildings represent the spatial logics of the two social imaginaries.

While most of the apartment buildings built since the 1960s in Kolkata are seven-to-10 storeys high, with two or three units per floor, many of the complexes in the east and south-east of the city that have come up since the turn of the millennium are considerably higher and have many more flats — up to 30 storeys with hundreds of units — along with a plethora of amenities and leisure facilities. Animesh Sen, property developer, distinguishes three categories of apartment buildings by square footage and the presence or absence of servants' quarters:

1. Flats up to an area of 800 square feet with no servants' quarters (in the southeastern areas of the city, such as in Garia)
2. Flats under 2,000 square feet with servants' quarters on the ground floor or none at all (in the southern parts of the city, such as in Gariahat)

3. Flats of 2,500–3,000 square feet or more with attached servants' quarters (originally in central Kolkata, Loudon Street; now in the elite residential areas of Alipur and Ballygunge). These flats may have a room and a toilet for live-in servants.

Households in the first category typically employ part-time servants, while those in the second and the third categories may have live-in servants or full-time servants who live in nearby bastis or commute from out-lying districts — but all have servants.

Kolkata's employers

Two generations of bhadralok employers are presented in our analysis. While the older generation of employers (business people and professionals), who today range in age from the sixties to the eighties, are still imbricated in an ideology of reform, nationalism and progress, which had at its centre a particular notion of the household, we also focus on a younger generation of bhadralok, who may be considered to be a part of India's globalizing middle class. Although varying by class fraction and wealth, the older generation of employers had vivid memories of the household arrangements of their youth and of the servants with whom they grew up, many before Indian Independence in 1947.

The younger generation of employers are children of businessmen, professionals and government employees. They are themselves corporate executives, professionals, NGO workers, clerks, and teachers. Now in their thirties and forties, this generation is immersed in a world economy and its members are, to varying degrees, participants in global cultural and consumption practices. Some of them are part of an educated, world-travelling class, others are educated and more deeply rooted in place, but they are all products of, and invested in, the Indian nationalist project of modernity.

Despite generational and class fractional differences, the employers have more in common than not. Both older and younger employers consciously compare the past life of families and households to present circumstances and attempt, variously invoking sentiment and expedience, to retain aspects of Kolkata's culture of servitude rooted in the feudal past, simultaneously viewing themselves as the vanguard of Indian modernity. Indeed, as Sara Dickey (2000) has argued about employers in Madurai, both upper- and middle-class employers in Kolkata are united in seeing the poor in the same way. Today's bhadralok employers have a complex relationship to modernity, both ruing the demise of things as they were (in an idealized past) — holding fast to elements that seem to have withstood the passage of time — and eagerly embracing modernity as social and economic progress in a globalizing age. Most significantly for our purposes, Indian middle- and upper-class elites engage with modernity as a self-conscious domestic project through which the sociality and spatiality of the intimate sphere of the home may be reconceived. The space of the home, across middle-class fractions and generations, continues to be unimaginable without the essential servant, even though that servant may now be a stranger and part-time worker rather than someone belonging to a family or village that has served the household for generations. Indeed, through all of our 80-odd in-depth interviews and our survey of 500 middle-class households, we came across only one couple which had deliberately decided not to keep a servant.

From 'feudal' to 'modern' households: The basic three premises

Servants are essential to the running of the middle-class household

For the upper strands of the middle class, three adjustments have had to be made in their servant-maintaining practices in the transition from the big house to the flat. First, the acceptance of primarily female rather than the traditionally preferred male servants; second, the replacement of live-in with live-out and full-time with part-time servants; and third, the adaptation to the servant body and the need for new spatial management in the restricted space of the flat. Yet servants remain essential. We have written about this in greater detail in Ray and Qayum (2009), but here we address the issue of space and control, on the one hand, and the indispensability of the servant, on the other. Servant management in the flat has had to be re-engineered relative to that of the big house. For one older-generation employer, her daughter-in-law's feat in keeping 'everything under control in a flat with two live-in women who sleep in the living room' is nothing short of a marvel. The mother-in-law still lives in an old big house and recognizes that conditions in an apartment require the employer to deploy different management skills — such as the exercise of strict supervision over both the servants' work and the servants themselves — than in earlier times.

The challenges for the employer–servant dynamic go beyond just the physical and spatial. Mrinalini, the artist in her sixties introduced in the opening section, reflects on the problems of having a live-in servant in a small apartment:

> In this new social milieu there is no place for a person living in your house who is not a relative or a friend. In those days, when you had servants living in the house, there was space; they weren't mingling with you all the time. In a flat you don't have that — your own space. You don't have physical space, so you have to create your distance. They are physically always there; you cannot move them out of sight. If you become too close in a flat, you don't have any privacy.

The modern flat was not designed for the extended family, or the multi-generational joint family, but rather for the capitalist nuclear family. Some young couples actively try to create an ideal nuclear family with its corresponding emotional space.[14] A servant has no place in the ideology of the nuclear family, yet those who are creating such families carry with them the assumption, originating in the big house, that households cannot be run without servants. These new nuclear families — typically married couples, both spouses working outside of the home, with one or more children — thus make their own compromises. Some, for example, have decided that they do not want a servant in the house in the evenings and weekends when the couple is home from work, and make arrangements for servants to depart upon their return from work, leaving their tended child and dinner behind. This enables them to benefit from the housework and child care performed by the servant in their absence without having to deal with the physical and emotional proximity of a 'non-family member'.

As dual-income professional couples actively work to modernize their family lives without giving up the essential servant, lower middle-class families struggle to maintain their shaky hold on middle-class status through the hiring of a servant, as the following two examples illustrate.[15] Sanjay, a young man from a lower middle-class background (he is a clerk at a university), told us that every family he knew while growing up and in present times had a part-time worker for two daily chores: the floors and the dishes. Indeed, he argued:

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[14] In interviews in Bengali, employers would use the English word 'privacy' to explain why they no longer wanted live-in servants even if they could afford them.

> However poor the family — and I know several very poor ones in my neighbourhood — they'll cut back on the number of times cooking vessels need to be cleaned; that is, they'll have them washed once instead of twice a day, to cut back on costs, but they will hire someone to do it.

The second example is Rita, one of only two servants we met who have actually been able to leave domestic service. Apparently, Rita's female employer had become so fond of her that she encouraged her to train to attain a marketable skill, personally made all the arrangements for a wedding when Rita fell in love, and helped her set up her new home. Today, Rita works as a beautician and she and her husband, a pharmacist's assistant, have a home of their own, albeit a rented room. Because both her former employer and her husband's employer are willing to back them, they may actually qualify for a loan to buy a house on the outskirts of the city. Rita's husband now wants her to employ a servant to help her with her daily chores, but Rita said to us laughing, 'I am used to taking care of houses five times bigger than mine, but he insisted that I should not do this any more'. Hiring a servant would be proof, for her husband, that their tenuous middle-classness had been achieved.

For those whose middle-classness is inherited, the new order requires adjustment to part-time workers, women workers and restricted spaces, and thus calls upon different management skills. For those who are aspiring for middle-classness, the ability to hire labour — often child labour — for even an hour or two a day allows them a sense of having arrived.

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[15] In our survey of 500 households, 37.7 per cent of them with multiple earners earned less than ₹ 10,000 a month, but all had a servant.

From the 'rhetoric of love' to the wage contract

Household- and servant-management techniques vary not only because of space but also because of time. One of the major issues for the older Kolkata middle class has been getting accustomed to part-time servants. The intimate emotional transition to part-time from full-time and live-in servants is complicated since middle-class memory across generations revolves around the old faithful family retainer, who may or may not have actually been present in family history, but who is a key figure in the nostalgic class memory of the Bengali middle class.

School children in West Bengal inevitably encounter (and often recite at inter-school elocution competitions) a poem by Tagore called 'Puraton Bhritya' or the Old Faithful Servant. It tells the story of a buffoonish, often incompetent, servant whom the mistress of the house always accuses of thievery, but who ultimately sacrifices his life for his master by nursing him through smallpox when everybody else abandons him. The master recovers but Keshto, the servant, dies of the disease. This poem has come to represent the ideal family retainer, and indeed, several employers would say, when referring to a family retainer in their past, 'oh you know, he was a real Puraton Bhritya type'.

This old faithful family retainer ideal represents the servant of the old order to the employer class. Loyalty was his main characteristic — loyalty to the point of self-sacrifice, for he would be willing to put the employer's family before his own, and indeed, his employer's life before his own. The family retainer was usually a man (it was not expected that a woman would be able to put the employer's family before hers), and many of the older generation of employers we interviewed recalled the ways in which their old servants were tied to their families. A retired librarian commented:

> In my father's time there were more people and they all lived in this house. There was so much love and affection then. The person who raised us [the servant] also had the right to beat us. If we were upstairs studying and the cook called us to eat, and if we were late or spilled rice, then we would be beaten. Servants had the same rights as parents, and they loved us. They were more dominant and very independent, they had rights over us. But things have changed, the whole country has changed. There is politics now and so you have to exercise discipline. Otherwise they will go out of control and we will have to leave the house.

If the family retainer was devoted to the family, it was, of course, because he lived with them, and served them and them alone. Thus, ideas of love and loyalty could circulate among (especially) the older generation of employers. If the male family retainer who lived out his life with the family who employed him is one end of the spectrum, the part-time woman servant who works for multiple houses is the other extreme and embodies the unruly present. This polarity causes an interesting generational split amongst employers. According to the younger employers, one must be aware that part-time work operates on a different temporal cycle, and thus those who do not adjust to the new logic are doomed to have servants who do not last. Said Srimati of her mother-in-law:

> She didn't understand that you couldn't just give part-timers more and more to do like you could with live-in servants. She thought that through small gifts of clothes and money part-timers could be induced to do extra work. The result was that they became greedy. They would agree to do extra things in return for gifts but did not have the extra time to do the extra tasks, and would be late for the next house. Part-time servants are so time-bound that if anything happened, everything would fall apart and then there would be bitter words with my mother-in-law. So servants simply do not last in our house.

In other words, Srimati's mother-in law continued to try to impose the logic of a full-time servant, who was paid for his full-time pre-sence, on a part-time servant who was paid by the task. This fundamental change which necessitated a re-orientation of the employer–servant relationship was one with which Srimati's mother-in-law, raised as she was in the feudal culture of servitude, could not cope. Srimati herself, however, had gradually learned to do so, adjusting her expectations to the emerging culture of servitude:

> I used to once scold them when they disappeared. I expected them to always be present! But now I say: 'You do whatever you think, go wherever you want, but I have these things you have to do'. They also understand me, and they always honour what I ask of them.

As a working woman without children, Srimati is not only not keen on having a live-in servant, she considers her mother-in-law to be incompetent and non-modern because of her failure to grasp the fundamentally different logic of part-time work.

Younger women employers now seek a more impersonal relationship with domestic workers and actively avoid assuming responsibility for them. Like the employers studied by Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo (2001) in Los Angeles, many younger women employers in Kolkata expressed discomfort with having expectations of a relationship that extends beyond the contract. Keya, who works for an NGO, said:

> There's far more tension with women around because they open up and talk to us a lot more as women, whereas men [servants] wouldn't communicate their innermost problems to us . . . [With women] you get so involved with their personality, their personal problems, they expect you to understand them more as women.

She went on to compare the relationship her mother-in-law had with servants to her own:

> My mother-in-law does far more for the servants than I do in terms of looking after their needs. She will inquire about their home life, if they have enough to eat. I don't need to know that. I simply say: you need food, take it. [One is] not looking at it as a family relationship . . . if it's not suiting you, then you leave . . . As a human being, if you have problems I can help you to a certain extent, but I cannot solve your problems for you, if you don't begin to help yourself.

Relating how she failed in an attempt to help her servant save money in a bank, Keya concluded, 'At some point, shouldn't she be responsible for her life?' Keya's struggle is evident here. She is aware that older employers, like her mother-in-law, and their servants may cultivate reciprocal affection, but she resists such attachments and opts for a discourse of self-help that circulates in the global development NGO circuit of which she is a part.

Many of the young working women we interviewed were attuned to the modern wage contract, yet wished for affectionate, attentive child care from servants — the sort that they themselves grew up with in joint families with old-fashioned family retainers — which in itself implies something rather different from a contractual relationship. According to one corporate executive:

> I would prefer my daughter to be at home, with one person who is like a grandmother . . . so I'd like to build my relationship with that person, as an exceptional case, for my daughter. I would still prefer her to be at

> home rather than at a day care centre. But all other jobs should be done along the Western model.

In this case, 'Western model' implies contractual, impersonal, managed relationships of work. On the one hand, then, young professional women, struggling to manage multiple demands, would like to dispense with both the inequalities of the old order — servants sleeping in the corridor with no fan, eating different food from different plates, suffering abuse — as well as its reciprocal ties. Yet their need for a servant who would provide child care and love their children further complicates this uneasy relationship. They recognize that they cannot escape the web of dependency and need without jettisoning the essential servant, which they are not willing to do. What employers appear to want is a contract which contains bounded loyalty and affection. Thus, just as the gradual erasure of the spatial distinction between the employer body and the servant body remains incomplete, so does the desire for the contract.

Distinctive class cultures

> That variant of the master–slave dialectic through which the possessors affirm their possession of their possessions. In so doing, they distance themselves still further from the dispossessed, who, not content with being slaves to necessity in all its forms, are suspected of being possessed by the desire for possession, and so potentially possessed by the possessions they do not, or do not yet, possess. (Bourdieu 1984: 256)
>
> This chap must make extra money in a covert way through the bazaar book. His wife [who works in another household] also makes extra, I'm sure. How do they keep their daughters in such style? Where do they get their money?
>
> (Bhagat Singh, a well-to-do bachelor employer, on his man-servant)[16]

In Bengal, the distinction between the bhadralok and the others (that is, those who are poor and uncivilized) is 'naturally' reflected in a caste-inflected class divide within the bhadra home.[17] Precisely because they are not bhadralok, servants' bodies, dress, behaviour, and aspirations, by definition, ought not to be similar or identical to those of the employers. And when those distinctions begin to blur, or are perceived as such, it makes employers (both old and young; nationalist and globalized) anxious.

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[16] We have used pseudonyms throughout to protect the identity of those interviewed. In this particular case, this older employer requested that he be called Bhagat Singh, a man he most admired. It reflects perfectly, among other things, his generation's stake in the Indian nation state and the nationalist project.

Kakoli, an older-generation employer, recalled the obvious difference in clothing that once marked the women of the household from the servants:

> When we were young, the maidservants came to us bare-bodied [without a blouse], with no slippers, and with just a sari to wrap [themselves in]. Now you can't tell the difference between the servant and someone who is part of the family — they dress, use cosmetics, want to be like us. Earlier, they didn't have the money or the idea [that they could].

What is particularly noticeable for the older generation of employers is the perceived change in the dress of the servants over the past several decades. They remember servants of the feudal big house in the past as being immediately recognizable as servants because of their dress, manner, bearing, and so on — visible markers all.

The younger generation of employers also perceive a temporal change in the desires of servants. Unlike the self-effacing gratitude of the past, they see servants today as having expectations of a different order as far as clothes, appearance and, ultimately, status are concerned. Thus explained Partha:

> What my parents gave servants when I was young, there was never a question of choice. What my parents gave, they took it or they threw it away. They never had the audacity to come and say I don't like this, please give me this. Today servants will come and say I want this sari of this make, or I need this shawl of that. They will make their choices, and they expect you to adhere to that.

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[17] 'This affirmation of power over a dominated necessity always implies a claim to a legitimate superiority over those who, because they cannot assert the same contempt for contingencies in gratuitous luxury and conspicuous consumption, remain dominated by ordinary interests and urgencies . . . The most "classifying" privilege thus has the privilege of appearing to be the most natural one' (Bourdieu 1984: 55).

Tensions over the perceived erosion of these markers of class distinction and efforts to maintain them permeate daily life. Employers sharply criticize attempts by servants to erase class distinction through *appearing* to be more like the employers. The feeling is that a servant's scarce resources should be spent on something uplifting, like education, not on make-up and clothes that can only cause confusion and consternation by enabling servant girls and women to acquire a middle-class appearance. In these discussions, it is the well-being of the servant that is always apparently of concern, while anxieties over the possible collapse of distinction are thinly disguised.[18]

Unease with the blurring of well-established class lines made Bhagat Singh wonder about the children of servants who lived in buildings like his. 'Today, children of servants grow up in the midst of affluence. How do they cope? Instead of growing up in a "natural way", they dress up smartly, change themselves. Sunil's [his servant] girl didn't get through her exams but has become fashionable'. He then went on to tell the story of an encounter with a little girl in school uniform in the apartment elevator. He asked her where she lived, expecting her to respond with telling him her apartment number. He was surprised to hear that she lived in the servants' quarters, and his discomfort came through in the telling.

The confusion and consternation felt by employers is not just a matter of social embarrassment, but signals a threat to bhadralok identity. For if servant children can be mistaken for the pampered children of the upper middle classes, and if female servants 'pass' as middle-class women, then employers could mistakenly socialize with them, talk to them as peers and, most worrying of all, conceivably fall in love with them. The construction of social life relies to a great extent on the traditional hierarchies and markers of class, caste and gender. The erasure of such distinctions would inevitably impinge on the identity and hegemony of the employer classes — and their endogamy; hence the countervailing efforts. And here we can once again follow Bourdieu: 'it is an immediate adherence, at the deepest level of the habitus, to the tastes and distastes, sympathies and aversions, fantasies and phobias which, more than declared opinions, forge the unconscious unity of a class' (Bourdieu 1984: 77).

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[18] One employer spent considerable time trying to convince her servant to send his daughter to a 'more ordinary but perfectly good' school rather than the 'convent school' he had set his heart on. She feared that his daughter would, as she confided in us later, get ahead of herself, become too ambitious, would ultimately fail and cause her father to feel devastated. So, certainly, he must send his daughter to school, but an 'ordinary' one.

There is one other element that serves as a mark of distinction that must be mentioned here. India is a country with a low women's labour force participation rate, and the rate is particularly low in West Bengal.[19] Much has been written about the creation in the late 19th century of the respectable *bhadramahila*, the female partner to the bhadralok, who came to be defined by her active and cultivated presence in the home — refined and responsible for the inner life of the family. Civilized protection for women was to be found within the confines of the home and family. Therefore, unprotected women (those who were exposed to the moral and social opprobrium of the public gaze) were by definition uncivilized and shameless. For the poor woman or the low-caste woman who was obliged to work outside of the home, the street was unavoidable and, as such, she was inevitably classed with 'women of the street' or prostitutes.[20] The assumption of sexual misconduct on the part of domestic servants and other women workers stemmed, therefore, from their crossing the line between the home and the street, *lajja* (shame) and shamelessness, respectability and promiscuity. As the maximum domestic cultural expression of the dominant class, this had widespread influence across social classes and castes, yielding what Kumkum Sangari has called an 'astonishing consensus' around domestic labour, domesticity and the domestic sphere (Sangari 2001: 307). The losers in this consensus were those without protection and those who could not afford to stay at home:

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[19] The Government of India's *Census of India 2001* reports women's labour force participation in West Bengal as18.08 per cent, with the urban areas recording a participation at 11.13 per cent.

[20] As one physician exclaimed when told that we were riding the commuter trains, talking with part-time servants who came to the city from the outskirts: 'You rode on the train with them? You probably caught something from them. They are dirty, foul-mouthed, *bidi*-smoking, and smelly. There is plenty of work to be done in the villages, but they want to come to Kolkata for *certain* reasons. Here they work for only a few hours and then run off home. The women who come into Kolkata in the evening *say* they are ayahs [those who look after sick and elderly people] on night duty'.

women who were thereby excluded from the domestic sphere and proper domesticity and, we would add, those men who were unable to provide protection.[21] The ideological power of this consensus still holds.

In her study based on 200 households in Kolkata, Sirpa Tenhunen quotes an activist from the CPI(M), which reveals in many ways the problem of class and the working woman in Kolkata:

> A few days ago a woman came suddenly to see me. We had met by the highway. I told her I need a maid and asked if she could find someone for me. She asked how much I could pay. I told her. She said, 'I can work for you if I can explain this to my husband; he does not like it and he does not want to understand it; we have two children'. I asked her, 'what does her husband do?' She said he drove a car. I asked her, 'why should you work if your husband is able to support you? It is very good work to maintain the *samsar* [household]. Each person has his own responsibility'. I explained this to her using my common sense. (Tenhunen 2003: 66)

Indeed, the situation of women servants in Kolkata clearly corresponds to the imperatives of the dominant ideology that women should work for a wage only if obliged to do so out of economic necessity; normally, they should be maintained by fathers and husbands whose patriarchal familial duty is to do so. Middle-class Kolkata is unified in pitying the women servants of the city, and in condemning their husbands who have signally failed in their patriarchal responsibilities.

Conclusion

While the institution of domestic servitude is undergoing change, obsolescence is not expected anytime soon. The transition from primarily live-in to part-time domestic work in Kolkata, therefore, does not indicate the disappearance of the culture of servitude. The social relations and identities of the modern middle and upper classes continue to be constituted by the presence of the essential servant. The troublesome compromises made around the notions of space, privacy and demeanour in the restricted living space of the modern flats are the cost that employers in Kolkata have accepted they have to pay to reproduce the domestic sphere.

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[21] Women jute workers also faced the consequences of this consensus, since as women, they were not considered workers and were thus denied the protection of labour laws (Fernandes 1997).

Corporate managerial discourses have only partially replaced the older feudal discourses of affection, loyalty and dependence. New desires on the part of employers for a contractual, impersonal relationship have not produced a contemporary ideology to match the power of the rhetoric of love in traversing class lines. And therefore employers and domestics engage in a complex choreography of expectations and disappointments as they negotiate the terrain of a newly emerging culture of servitude.

It is clear, however, that the identity of Kolkata's respectable classes continues to rest on the maintenance of distinction from the serving classes. New aspirations on the part of servants and servants who are seen to 'pass' as non-servants cause anxiety because they threaten to erase crucial distinction. Many employers, young and old, do recognize that in a modern, democratic world, servants should be considered persons with rights. In their individual homes, however, few employers are able to reconcile the discourse of rights with both employers' and servants' expectations rooted in an older culture of servitude. When women servants make claims on the employer's maternalism, younger women employers can deny them, rejecting such a relationship as pre-modern. Yet, when servants claim modern collective or worker rights, employers feel threatened precisely because the possibility of a rights-bearing individual in one's home imperils distinction.

Bengali middle-class employers enact the immutability of class through their words and labour practices at home, their ordering of space, their refusal to engage in manual work, their assumptions of control over other people's labour, and their perception of servants as possessing a distinctive nature, even as they struggle to maintain such a perception. As they do so, they recreate naturalized inequalities in 'modern' forms to constitute themselves as appropriately modern middle-class Indians.

Acknowledgements

This essay is taken in large part from Ray and Qayum (2009).

11

The Sexual Character of the Indian Middle Class: Sex Surveys, Past and Present

Patricia Uberoi

> Sex penetrates the whole person: a man's sexual constitution is a part of his general constitution. There is considerable truth in the dictum: 'A man is what his sex is'. (Havelock Ellis 1946: 3)
>
> In the space of a few centuries, a certain inclination has led us to direct the question of what we are to sex. (Michel Foucault 1981: 78)

The ubiquity of 'sex-talk'

There is a widespread impression in India today that 'sex-talk' in the public domain has been increasing exponentially. Several months of 2008 were dominated by fervid media speculation on the 'Aarushi Double Murder Case' of Noida,[1] in which a teenage girl, Aarushi Talwar, was brutally slain — allegedly, in the first place, by the family's domestic servant; then, after the servant's decomposing body was discovered on the terrace of their house, by her dentist father; and then by the doctor's former compounder and two servants working for neighbouring families. A prurient blogger summed up much public speculation on the case thus:

> [D]octor talwar saw his late daughter doing his servant, got mad and killed them both. [W]hat I also think is that doctor's wife had something going on with the servant but doctor did not do much since he had his own fling going on. [B]ut when the servant nailed his daughter, he could not take it any more and killed them both.[2]

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[1] An upmarket suburb of the National Capital Region on the outskirts of Delhi.

[2] http://forums.sulekha.com/forums/coffeehouse/Aarushi-Talwar-Murder-Another-Honour-Killing (accessed 6 February 2009). On 29 December 2010, the CBI filed an official closure report on the still unsolved case in which the father remains the sole suspect. For a chronicling of the case, see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Noida_double_murder_case (accessed 7 February 2011) and 'The Untold Story', *India Today*, 24 January 2011, pp. 34–38.

In fact, this sensational case followed little more than a year after the gruesome 'Nithari Serial Murder Case', also in Noida. A wealthy and politically well-connected businessman and his servant were arrested following the discovery of the dismembered remains of 19 children reported missing over a period of several years from a nearby slum settlement. The discovery provoked public accusations of rape, sodomy, necrophilia and cannibalism, as well as organized call-girl, child-pornography and organ-trade rackets behind the high walls of respectable upper middle-class living.[3] And, once again, the involvement of domestic servants exposed the vulnerability of the vaunted Indian middle class to the material and symbolic instruments of their privileged class–caste status.[4]

These, of course, were just the more spectacular sex-related scandals of recent times.[5] Episodes of moral panic occasioned by supposed threats to Indian 'culture' and 'tradition' (Ghosh 1999), often with manifestly communal overtones, have saturated the post-liberalization popular media as well as the more informal networks of communication. Inappropriate attire (on the screen, on the ramp or on the street); the public display of intimacy (even between husbands and wives);[6] 'love marriage' in contravention of community norms or patriarchal authority (Chowdhry 2007;

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[3] Both the businessman, Moninder Singh Pandher, and his servant were sentenced to death, though the former was subsequently acquitted on 15 of the 19 murder charges. See http://en.wikpedia.org/wiki/2006_Noida_serial_murder_investigation (accessed 15 February 2010).

[4] For a perspicacious comment along these lines, see 'India's Dirty Laundry: The Murder Tearing Indian Society Apart', http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/indias-dirty-laundry-tearing-indian-society-apart-847914.html (accessed 6 February 2009). On the indispensability of domestic servants to the constitution of Indian middle-class identity, see Qayum and Ray (this volume).

[5] For an account of the 'sexualization' of the visual field a decade earlier, see, e.g., John (1998); also Rajagopal (1999).

[6] In a recent case which attracted media attention, a 28-year-old man and his 23-year-old wife were arrested by the police for 'sitting in an objectionable position near a Metro pillar and kissing due to which passersby were feeling disturbed'. See 'India couple's kiss not obscene', http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7866478.stm (accessed 4 February 2009); see also 'No kissing please, we are Indians', http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7871304.stm (accessed 6 February 2009).

Mody 2008); the studied, off-the-cuff or misrepresented opinions of celebrities on questions of love, sex and marriage; and the sexual attitudes and mores of youth — all these can and do become the cause of public denunciation and denial, applause and breast-beating. In particular, the Indian middle class seems to have developed a narcissistic preoccupation not merely with the sexual peccadilloes of the very rich and famous in India and abroad, which of course are liberally advertised, but with its own fraught and vulnerable sexuality.

One index of this middle-class autoeroticism is the recent institutionalization of the 'sex survey' as a conspicuous feature of the post-liberalization Indian media-scape (see Kapila 2011).[7] Whether read as a step in the direction of rationality, progress and sexual modernity, or, alternatively, as an incitement to immorality and license, sex surveys are touted as the privileged instrument through which factual evidence of the ground realities of postcolonial Indian sexuality can be garnered, and changing trends scientifically monitored. By 'sex survey', of course, one does not mean the earnest National Health and Family Welfare surveys of reproductive behaviour periodically conducted to monitor Indian population growth, sex ratios, 'risk' behaviour, etc., as the research input into state population and health policy planning. The reference is to the local deployment of a global survey template with a view to documenting the sexual lifestyle aspirations of the Indian upper-middle and middle classes, the social stratum that is regarded as the vanguard of consumerism, innovation and modernity.

Worldwide, the model of the contemporary sex survey is the famed Durex Sexual Wellbeing Global Survey, an on-line survey conducted since 1996 by the manufacturers of the world's leading condom brand, Durex, in 14 countries across the world where the company has, or aspires to have, a substantial market presence. Claimed to be 'the world's most comprehensive sex survey',[8] the annual Durex survey finds 'obligatory mention' in innumerable popular articles about sex; it is also the source of most of the sex statistics in the media in the UK,[9] and probably elsewhere in the world as well.[10] The Durex surveys construct what Kriti Kapila (2011) has felicitously called 'league tables' of global sexual performance, with different countries ranked vis-à-vis each other, and their relative performance and the changes in league ratings hailed or deplored (as the case may be) from year to year. All this makes for compelling media fodder, incidentally doubling as a market-research tool for the development of new products and region-appropriate advertising copy.[11] In a typical looping effect, the survey results become instantiated as the 'imagined norms' of global sexual modernity.[12] Similarly, at the national level, sex surveys set standards for 'competitive emulation', to use Thorstein Veblen's term (1957), and actively contribute to the production and consolidation of 'social distinction' (Bourdieu 1984).

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[7] I am grateful to Kriti Kapila for sharing with me her then unpublished article (Kapila 2011), based on the Indian media's reportage of sex-survey results and women's confessional sexual narratives posted on a prominent lifestyle website.

[8] See the Durex website at http://www.durex.com/en-GB/Pages/default/aspx (accessed 31 May 2009).

As with the emergence of India's 'new' middle class itself, the 'sexualization' of the Indian public sphere is routinely linked by observers with the policies of economic liberalization and globalization that have been incrementally implemented in India since the early 1990s (John 1998; Rajagopal 1999). Conversely, the emergence of the re-tooled Indian advertising industry in the new era is identified with a brilliant and unprecedentedly successful advertising campaign in 1991 on behalf of a new product, the upmarket KamaSutra condom (see esp. Mazzarella 2003: Chapters 3 and 4; also John 1998: 377–78; Rajagopal 1999: 83–84). In this notable campaign, marked by scandalously daring but undeniably classy visuals, the condom, which was hitherto seen as inherently unaesthetic and anti-erotic, was transformed from an 'anathema' into a desirable and elegant 'accessory' of sensual pleasure. KamaSutra inaugurated an erotic revolution in the visual field. It promised immediate gratification in place of the infinite deferral of pleasure associated with Gandhian asceticism and earnest Nehruvian socialism, and was seen as marking India's transition from material stagnation and spiritual humiliation to global lifestyle modernity (Mazzarella 2003: Chapters 3 and 4).

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[9] See the well-taken critique of the procedural, methodological and ethical issues in the Durex surveys by UK sex educator Dr Petra Boynton, http://www.drpetra.co.uk/blog/?p=430 (accessed 15 July 2009).

[10] For its visibility in contemporary China, for instance, see Elfick (2008: 215). In the Indian context see, e.g., 'Indians wait to lose virginity', http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/India/Indians-wait-to-lose-virginity/articleshow/2175964.cms, and 'Durex survey: Indians not sexually satisfied', http://ibnlive.in.com/news/durex-survey-indians-not-sexually-satisfied/64245-19.html (accessed 31 May 2009).

[11] In this regard, Petra Boynton cites the recent focus in the Durex surveys on the use of 'sex toys', an interest that happened to coincide with the introduction by Durex of a new line of sex-toy products. See http://www.drpetra.co.uk/blog/?p=430 (accessed 15 July 2009).

[12] Ibid.

A number of factors were intrinsic to the acknowledgement of the KamaSutra campaign as a textbook example of successful product advertising in the new era of liberalization and globalization. One was the reputation for a 'scientific' (or should one say more 'professional') market-research approach to an advertising commission, compared to the laid-back, hit-and-miss style of the earlier generation of Indian advertising professionals (Mazzarella 2003). The second was the yoking of self-indulgent sexuality with a proclaimed commitment to public service, for instance, the prevention of unplanned pregnancy and protection against HIV/AIDS (ibid.). The third factor was the serendipitous naming of the product as KamaSutra, suggesting the essential modernity of India's ancient *ars erotica* and a recovery of the true sexual self from the dour throes of colonial repression. Finally, through its slick style of address, the KamaSutra campaign identified an emerging class of consumers whose unashamed consumption of hedonistic 'experiences' (cf. Elfick 2008), in addition to high-end products of the global market, was posited as a crucial marker of *social distinction*, authorizing sexual pleasure for *us* (i.e., the new, enlightened middle class of consumers), and fertility control for *them* (the vast, economically and socially backward, majority of Indians) (John 1998: 386–87). Ultimately, it was the constitution of the middle class in terms of its *sexual character*, along with the simultaneous construction of individual personhood through the acquisition of a variety of sexual experiences, that marked the cognitive breakthrough achieved by the

KamaSutra campaign.[13] The prim gridlocking of sex and marriage was ruptured as sex (for the privileged middle class) became touted as unashamedly and pleasurably recreational.[14]

Commentators on India's belated sexual revolution, like those on the sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s in the West, are wont to describe the lifestyle changes presently under way as an accelerating process of liberation from the repression of Victorian sexual values imposed during colonial rule and continued into the era of self-denying postcolonial nation-building: a long-awaited lifting of the heavy veil of silence surrounding all things sexual (John and Nair 1998). However, the 'repressive hypothesis', as Michel Foucault has argued with typical flair in the European case (Foucault 1981: 15–49; see also Weeks 1985: Chapter 2), obscures the fact that the 19th-century valorization of 'conjugal, monogamous sexuality' was matched by a voyeuristic preoccupation with its scientized and pathologized opposite — 'nonconjugal, nonmonogamous sexuality'. In fact, 'sex-talk' proliferated at the time even as repression intensified. Moreover, notwithstanding the conjuncture of knowledge and power implicated in the creation of the new *scientia sexualis* (sexology) and the institution of modern technologies for the surveillance, regulation and state control of sexuality, Foucault makes a claim that might surprise many of his followers, namely, that

> the *primary concern* [of the science of sex] was not repression of the sex of the classes to be exploited, but rather the body, vigour, longevity, progeniture, and descent of the classes that 'ruled' . . . What was formed was a political ordering of life, not through an enslavement of others, but through *an affirmation of self*. (Foucault 1981: 123; emphasis mine)

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[13] In her article on 'Sex, Television and the Middle Class in China' (2008), based on fieldwork in China's southern showcase Special Export Zone, Shenzhen, Elfick records the boast of an upwardly mobile young professional woman (an aficionado of the American TV series 'Sex and the City') that she had recently (*i*) had sex with a foreigner, (*ii*) bought a new car, and (*iii*) made her first visit overseas, thus linking the acquisition of status-enhancing goods and experiences to her self-esteem as a member of China's emerging socio-economic elite.

[14] See Sanjay Srivastava, 'Special Effects', *India Today,* 7 December 2009, pp. 46–56.

Returning to the contemporary Indian scene with this caution in mind, one can see that the impression that a veil of prudish 'silence' around sexuality is now finally being lifted is not empirically sustainable. As Sanjay Srivastava illustrates in his book, *Passionate Modernity* (2007), sexuality has been an abiding, if episodic, feature of the public discourse of Indian modernity through a century and a quarter, deeply imbricated in projects of social and political reform (Mayo 2000; Uberoi 1996a), and in the articulation of national and communitarian identities (C. Gupta 2000; T. Sarkar 2001). This public discourse may be conducted on behest of the modernizing state (colonial and postcolonial); through the modern disciplines that generate knowledge on issues of sexuality (medicine, social psychology, psychiatry, sociology, social work, eugenics, demography, ethology, not to mention the somewhat disreputable science of sexology, which centrally addresses this theme);[15] and through the numerous informal channels of print, electronic and new digital media in English and the Indian vernaculars which comprise what Srivastava calls (parodying the language of urban rehabilitation) the 'unauthorized regularized' public sphere.[16] One could even say, and with some plausibility, that it is sex-talk (whether repressed or exhibitionist, repressive or permissive), more than anything else, that has constituted and continues to constitute the public sphere of Indian modernity and the subjectivity of the modern individual in her/his class, ethnic and national location (cf. Felski 1998: 2; Foucault 1981: 78).

While the secondary literature on Indian sexuality and identity formation has focused especially on the relation between sexuality and nationalism, and on sexuality in relation to issues of community identity, this essay takes seriously Foucault's suggestion that the deployment of sexual 'knowledge' may have an important connection with *class formation* and the construction of *class identities*, especially the self-understanding of the upper middle classes. Beginning with a brief and critical overview of the role of the sex survey in the science of sexology, I examine one of a recent series of high-profile surveys of Indian male and female sexual attitudes and behaviour published in the weekly magazine *India Today* in the last quarter of 2007.[17] In fact, this was one of those odd cases where the sociologist finds herself a participant in the social phenomenon she is describing, she being one of the so-called experts called upon to lend the weight of disciplinary authority to the survey data presented.[18] When it came to it, however, I found myself unable to overcome my scepticism regarding the whole enterprise of sex surveying, let alone its recurrent sensationalization through the print media. Desperately seeking a face-saving peg to hang my reflections on, I turned for inspiration to an article that had long roused my curiosity. This was a report of a pioneering study of the sexual behaviour of a sample of middle-class men in Bombay (now Mumbai) conducted in the late 1930s by the famous Bombay-based Indologist–sociologist G. S. Ghurye, a polymath among Indian sociologists.[19]

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[15] On the history of Indian sexology in the context of 20th-century 'sexual reform', family planning and eugenics movements, see Srivastava (2007: Chapter 2).

[16] Srivastava sees this informal/non-official discourse as contesting both official sex-talk (e.g., the statist discourse of family-planning programmes) and the discourse of the modern scientific 'experts' (Srivastava 2007: 25).

Like the spate of high-profile, new-millennium sex surveys, of which the *India Today* 2007 sex survey was one (see Kapila 2011), Ghurye's survey also implicitly identified the *educated Indian middle class* (broadly understood) with a potential leadership role in life-style innovation, thereby making a case for the 'scientific' study of the sexual mores of this critical social stratum. At the same time, and notwithstanding its brevity (just 18 pages in length) and its methodological problems,[20] it seemed to me that this early effort in fact casts the contemporary surveys in a new light. In elaborating this comparison, I draw substantially on my 'expert' opinion on the *India Today* 2007 sex survey,[21] deploying Ghurye's elliptical contribution to highlight some of the unexplained erasures and silences of the contemporary survey, seven decades on. A comprehensive history of the 'transformation of intimacy' (cf. Giddens 1992) of the Indian middle classes is yet to be written, but hopefully this brief excursus will provide a much-needed historical depth to a phenomenon that is usually interpreted as merely a social concomitant of the liberalization and globalization policies instituted in India from the 1990s, when middle-class identities began to cohere around consumption practices (see Deshpande 2003: Chapter 6; Srivastava 2007: 3). A consideration of Ghurye's early study also invites us to consider the particularities of the social and historical contexts in which he wrote, rather than uncritically accept the prevailing stereotype of pre-liberalization repressed sexuality.

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[17] Issue of 26 October 2007; also available on the *India Today* website (archives) — http://indiatoday.intoday.in/site/Story/1668/Cover%20Story/Living+happily+never+after.html (accessed 4 February 2011).

[18] It was in this capacity that I was privileged to share the raw data from which the issue's cover story was constructed. My thanks are due to Kaveree Bamzai, the commissioning editor of the issue.

[19] See Ghurye (1973). My interest in Ghurye was first provoked by his several important contributions to the sociology of family and kinship, and latterly by a review by Carol Upadhya of his role as one of the founding figures of Indian sociology (Upadhya 2007a).

[20] Some of them are in common with the *India Today* 2007 survey, and indeed with the procedures of survey research in general (see the section that follows entitled 'The science of sexology').

The science of sexology

The science of sexology has long fought to establish itself as a worthy academic discipline spanning and linking the natural, human and social sciences.[22] As with any other discipline, sexology research is conducted through a variety of methodologies, chief among them being questionnaires, surveys, interviews, clinical observations, case studies, laboratory research, and experimentation (on animals). However, to the extent that it has succeeded in overcoming the stigma of disreputability that it attracted from the moment of its birth, it has done so by appropriating the methodologies of the natural sciences and/or the technologies of statistical analysis, thereby, as one critic has put it, embracing 'a legacy of positivist assumptions, concepts, and methods ill-suited to understanding a subject so thoroughly saturated with culture' (Tiefer 2000: 103). In particular, it is the practice of survey research in the empiricist tradition of Anglo-American sociology that has achieved the highest visibility and public acceptability in sexology research. Indeed, by the 1950s, sex surveys had achieved something of a 'canonical' status as the self-evidently objective means for uncovering the factual truths of sexual attitudes and behaviour on a mass scale, and for monitoring social trends on this basis (Stanley 1995: 8). Coupled with the parallel practice of market research (and the two overlap institutionally in many specific instances),[23] the findings and 'breakthroughs' of sexology research are eagerly seized upon and widely disseminated by the mass media (Tiefer 2000: 100),[24] thus creating new expectations and norms of middle-class sexual behaviour (Kapila 2011).

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[21] See Patricia Uberoi, 'A History of Intimacy', *India Today*, 26 October 2007, available on the *India Today* website, http://indiatoday.intoday/in/site/Story/1661/cover-story/A+history+of+intimacy.html (accessed 4 February 2011).

[22] See the account in Weeks (1985: esp. Chapter 4).

On the whole, sexology per se has not been viewed very kindly by feminist critics, and no doubt with ample reason. Notoriously, British feminist Sheila Jeffreys has been strident in her denunciation of sexology as a particularly insidious mode of patriarchal control masquerading as sexual liberation (Jeffreys 1990).[25] Others have taken a more measured and nuanced position on the 'sexological model of sexuality' while acknowledging the 'power' dimension of sexological research, its 'reification' of gender differences and its normativizing potential (Davidson & Layder 1994: 8, 14; Jackson 1994; Tiefer 2000: 102). The methodologies of sexology, and not only its rhetoric and sexual politics, have also been subject to critical scrutiny (see Davidson and Layder 1994). Although survey research, typically via questionnaires, is regarded as the most acceptable and 'manageable' methodology of sexological research, it clearly has its limitations. These include problems that are deemed common to techniques of survey research (in particular, problems of sample design, non-response, and questionnaire design and coding), but these well-known hazards have a sharper edge in the context of the investigation of the socially taboo field of sexual practice, as Davidson and Layder (ibid.) have illustrated in their critique of the famous post-War Kinsey Reports on male and female sexuality (Kinsey et al.: 1948, 1953).

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[23] The KamaSutra condom manufacturers also conduct a well-publicized national sex survey (see www.ksontheweb.com). The *India Today* survey that is my focus here was in turn executed by a market-and media-research organization, A. C. Nielsen-ORG MARG (see the subsequent section in this essay entitled 'The *India Today* survey of married sex [2007]').

[24] Relatedly, social demographic data is also often packaged and purveyed in newsworthy capsules. Another field in which survey research has high public visibility is psephology, the study of voting behaviour and the prediction of electoral trends.

[25] See also Leonore Tiefer's catalogue of the 10 characteristic features of the 'sexological model' in the 20th century industrialized world (Tiefer 2000: 82–83), many of which are self-evidently 'phallocentric' to the extent that they tend to evaluate female sexuality in the light of male sexual experience and performance (ibid.: 102). Some recent feminist scholarship has been somewhat more sympathetic to the pioneers of sexology, including the male sexologists, as well as to the strategic and selective appropriation of sexological discourse by female activists like Marie Stopes and Stella Browne (Bland and Doan 1998: 6; L. Hall 1998).

Similar criticisms are pertinent to both the *India Today* survey of 2007 and to Professor Ghurye's pioneering effort some seven decades earlier, although the latter, in my opinion, was far better attuned to the cultural meanings of sexuality in the Indian middle-class context. There is, of course, an important difference between Western surveys, such as the Kinsey Reports, and manifestly similar surveys conducted in colonial/postcolonial India, for in India (as no doubt elsewhere in the non-West) the very gesture of sex-surveying becomes irreversibly entangled with the production of nationalist discourses (see P. Chatterjee 1989a). This adds a peculiar piquancy to the recurrent episodes of moral panic over media reportage of changing sexual mores in contemporary India.

The *India Today* survey of married sex (2007)

In 2003, the widely circulated English-language weekly magazine *India Today* published its first explicit, cover-story sex survey in an issue devoted, interestingly, to 'Sex and the Indian woman', or 'what women want'.[26] No wonder it garnered much public attention, some of it hostile,[27] and persuaded the *India Today* management to make the sex survey an annual feature, presumably at considerable expense. 'Sex and the Indian woman' was followed by 'What men want' (2004), 'Sex and the single woman' (2005), 'Men in the middle' (2006), 'Sex and marriage' (2007), which is our specific focus here, and more recently, 'Sexy secrets' (2008), 'The fantasy report' (2009), on sexual fantasy, and 'Women want more' (2010), which revisits the theme of the first in the series. The conduct of the studies was outsourced to AC Nielsen-ORG MARG Research Ltd, a reputed market-research organization in India and South Asia which undertakes research on consumer, media and entertainment behaviour, and 'precision-marketing'.[28] Before its incorporation into the Netherlands-based firm of VNU, ORG MARG had a sound track record in social research and impact assessment on issues of development, displacement, education, health, and family planning, commissioned by government and international agencies.[29] The organization has an impressive reach throughout India, with five regional centres in different parts of the country and some 1,600 employees (according to figures for 2001).

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[26] It might be surmised that this seemingly daring exposure of the 'truth' of Indian sexuality was a copycat response to the slick KamaSutra sex survey, published some months earlier, and now an annual exercise along the lines of the Durex Global Sex Survey.

[27] As an angry letter to the editor commented on the *India Today* 2007 sex survey referred to in this article: 'Full-frontal frequent accounts of sexual practices and preferences so far confined to the bedroom will

The *India Today* sex survey followed many of the procedures and protocols developed over the years in ORG MARG. Some of them reflect, perhaps, the preoccupations of market researchers with identifying new and expanding consumer-goods markets as well as providing nation-wide coverage. For instance, in addition to the big metropolitan cities of Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, and Chennai, the

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feed human libido, promote promiscuity, and marginalize the hallowed institution of marriage sooner than feared. Is this what we want?', *India Today*, 19 November 2007, http://indiatoday.intoday.in/site/Story/1836/Letters/Moot+subject.html?page=0 (accessed 19 February 2009). Several other letters decried the 'titillating photographs', throughout the feature and especially on the cover, that 'do not make the magazine fit family read' and leave 'families' feeling 'uncomfortable' (ibid.)

[28] See the AC Nielsen-ORG MARG homepage at http://in.nielsen.com/industry/SocialIndia.shtml (accessed 4 February 2011).

[29] This 'social' research was presumably not as profitable as market research proper, and appeared to be viewed as a marker of the company's social commitment, as well, perhaps, as an academically legitimating gesture (cf. Mazzarella 2003). My own impression, based on several years' involvement with ORG MARG as a social scientist consultant, endorses Mazzarella's judgement in this regard.

sex survey covered the Information Technology hubs of Bangalore and Hyderabad, and the smaller cities of Lucknow, Jaipur and Patna (all state capitals), along with Ahmedabad (in Gujarat) and Ludhiana (in Punjab), totalling 11 centres, with more or less equal representation.[30] It might be added that the city-wise and regional breakdown of data is potentially headline-grabbing in the Indian context, especially when this 'sexual geography' runs counter to expectations. For instance, a boxed item in the survey of 2007 records that

> Only 10 per cent of the respondents had sex with their fiancée before marriage, while 5 per cent reported having had oral sex. More couples in smaller cities like Bangalore, Lucknow, Jaipur and Ahmedabad admitted to having pre-marital sex with their fiancée compared to the bigger cities. *Delhi and Hyderabad surprise us with their primness*, with 57 and 56 per cent saying that they shared no intimacies before marriage, not even kissing or holding hands.[31] [Emphasis mine]

A legitimizing note on 'Methodology'[32] positions the 2007 study as an attempt to understand 'different facets of [the] sexuality of married men and women', and 'trends on some issues as compared to earlier studies'. Reading between the lines, however, this agenda does not seem as transparent as it might initially appear. First, as I discuss further below, the questionnaire contains a number of leading questions that disclose pre-formed opinions on certain issues that may or may not be relevant to understanding married sex in contemporary India: for instance, the speculation that 'working women' may be sexually more promiscuous than housewives, and (consequently?) more disinterested in marital sex (cf. Jeffreys 1990). As to the comparison of 'trends', the 2007 survey was actually a rather inefficient instrument for the purpose, since only four of the total of 51 questions completely or very nearly matched the questions in both the surveys of 2003 and 2004.[33] (Another five questions were comparable or related across the surveys,[34] while questions regarding homosexuality and male sexual rights were asked of men in 2004, but not of women in 2003.) Nonetheless, and despite the short time frame, there seems to be a compulsion to underline cross-survey trends between 2003–04 and 2007, as though India's 7 to 8 per cent economic growth might be matched by a comparable growth in sexual voracity. Burnishing this 'rhetoric of change' (Kapila 2011), the analysts pointed out that while there was no difference in the stated importance of sex in the lives of Indian males between 2004 and 2007, 'more females feel that sex is important/very important [in 2007] than those in 2003'. On the question of foreplay, the analysts discerned what they called a 'stark difference' (positive, that is) in women's enthusiasm for foreplay in its various forms when compared to 2003, while men were declared much more satisfied with marriage in 2007 (58 per cent of them 'never bored'), compared to the 39 per cent 'never bored' in 2004.[35] The lead editorial article, entitled 'Unequal Partners', robustly announced that 39 per cent of the women surveyed were bored with sex in marriage, '*up 8 per cent* from the 2003 survey' (emphasis added). The same lead editorial also observed with dismay that 40 per cent of the married women said that their partner's pleasure was more important than their own, a figure that represented

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[30] By way of comparison, the KamaSutra Cross-Tab Sex Survey (2003) had 5,213 respondents spread over the eight cities of Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata, Ahmedabad, Hyderabad, Bangalore, Pune, and Lucknow (see www.ksontheweb.com/). In addition to the city-wise presentation of data, the *India Today* survey also invokes a *regional* perspective with a north–south–east–west breakdown of data, though these are presumably 'marketing' categories, unrelated to the kinship specialists' regional understanding of kinship norms and practices. Neither the *India Today* nor the KamaSutra surveys bothered to investigate India's northeast, even though from certain perspectives — for instance, HIV/AIDS research, or the alternative value systems of tribal populations — this region might plausibly command attention.

[31] However, a year down the track (see www.indiatoday.in/sexsurvey08; accessed 8 February 2009) we find that 'premarital sex finds favour among women in most metros, with Delhi girls topping the list at 27 per cent'.

[32] 'Methodology Note of the Sex Survey — 2007', circulated with the survey materials and partially reproduced in the issue.

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[33] These four questions concerned foreplay preferences, preferences with regard to coital positions, sexual preferences, and boredom (or otherwise) with marital sex. For a similar criticism of the spuriousness of claims to the monitoring of trends in the Durex survey, see http://www.drpetra.co.uk/blog/?p=430 (accessed 15 July 2009).

[34] Questions regarding premarital sex, the importance of sex, coital frequency, the duration of foreplay, and extramarital relations.

[35] Comments from the 'Snippets from the Sex Survey', circulated with the survey materials.

'*a 30 per cent jump* over the 2003 survey of what women want' (emphasis added).[36] It is indeed hard to imagine where all these so-called trends might be leading, but the reportage in itself engenders a sort of breathless *frisson.*

As regards sampling, the survey involved 2,563 married men and women between the ages of 21 and 50, with slightly fewer men than women, who were recruited following interviews to ascertain their basic demographic profiles. The respondents then filled up a 51-question schedule,[37] the final four questions being different for men and women. Assured of confidentiality, the respondents were required to drop the questionnaires in a box similar to a ballot box. It is unclear from the methodological note as to the extent to which the respondents might be deemed 'self-selected' (one of the criticisms of many sexology surveys, including Kinsey's and more recent internet-based ones), and what proportion of the questionnaires was rejected on grounds of non-response on 10–15 per cent of the items. Respondents were more or less equally divided between the age groups of 21–35 years and 36–50 years.[38] The survey was 'purposive' to the extent that (*i*) it involved only persons belonging to 'Socio-Economic Categories' (SEC) A and B, i.e., the upper socio-economic strata of the Indian population[39] to whom *India Today* is targeted; (*ii*) it involved *urban* residents only, in neglect of the bulk of the Indian population which remains rural; and (*iii*) the 11 metropolitan centres and cities were represented in more or less equal numbers, thereby demographically *over*-correcting the sample in favour of the smaller cities. The urban bias and the non-random weightages of the sample have obvious implications for the representativeness of the data as a record of contemporary *Indian* sexual behaviour, at the same time providing a *sexological* endorsement of India's emerging cultural duality.[40] Paradoxically, many of the features of the liberalized sexual mores now attributed to the upper middle classes as a reference group have long been characteristic of many lower-caste, tribal, and other marginal groups of Indian society (see, e.g., Parry 2001) whose life-styles are certainly not regarded as worthy of 'competitive emulation' in the narcissistic self-imaging of the upper middle classes.

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[36] I could not see that the figures given actually confirmed either of these statements.

[37] In addition to the 51 questions on sexual attitudes and behaviour, respondents were also required to provide basic demographic data, all in all making for a relatively lengthy questionnaire. According to critics, 'the more effort that the researcher demands of the respondent, the less consistent and reliable the results' (Davidson and Layder 1994: 106). Additionally, many of the questions were 'forced choice' questions (however, with a 'don't know'/won't say option), a strategy which may foreclose unanticipated responses and eliminate nuances (ibid.: 107).

[38] Incidentally, the 2009 'Fantasy Report' extended the upper age of respondents to 60 years.

[39] This classification usually refers to the upper two classes of urban households in a five-point scale based on both income and education and amounting to some 25 per cent of the urban population. (The methodological note was not precise in this regard, but identified the two classes as 'upper middle' and 'middle'.) It is interesting that the *India Today* sex survey of 2009 included (for unexplained reasons) SEC C.

The information generated by the questionnaire was tabulated according to the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the sample: sex, location (the 11 survey cities), socio-economic class (A or B), age (twenties, thirties and forties), region (east/west/north/south), children (none / one or more), family type (nuclear/joint), working women (yes/no), and type of marriage (arranged/love) — quite a panoply of variables![41] In several cases, the questions in the schedule sought to explicitly probe the implications of these variables with respect to conjugal sex: is there a diminution of ardour after children are born (apparently not, rather to the analyst's surprise); do people who have had 'love marriages' have more or better or more varied sex than those in arranged marriages (yes, they did, and they had more sexual experience before marriage, but they were also more likely to have an extramarital relationship); is living in a joint family a dampener (not really, but men more than women thought so, again to the analyst's surprise); are working women likely to have a better married life than housewives (men and women, including working women themselves, thought housewives were better off, but a stout third saw no difference); are working women seen as more sexually liberated and open-minded than non-working women (most people thought so, again, including working women themselves); and so on. In other cases, cross-tabulations revealed significant anomalies and asymmetries, particularly along gender lines, but also geographically.

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[40] One is reminded of sociologist M. N. Srinivas's comments on the emerging 'dual' cultures of independent India (1977).

[41] Note, however, that one variable that is routinely regarded as significant in fertility surveys, namely, religious affiliation, was not invoked in the *India Today* survey (cf. Bulbeck 2009: 17–20). In fact, in other types of public discourse, sexuality and religion are inextricably linked. See, for instance, C. Gupta (2000). Caste was also not considered a relevant variable, or perhaps there was an assumption of class–caste homogeneity. See Perveez Mody's 'Sexy politics', a comment on the *India Today* 2008 sex survey at http://indiatoday.intoday.in/site/Story/20585/Cover Story/Sexy+publics.html?page=0 (accessed 31 May 2009).

The most striking gender asymmetries, highlighted by both the analysts and the editor, are to be found in the responses to the question, 'What is the most important reason for you to have sex?', where 39 per cent of the women, but only 18 per cent of the men, responded, 'To please my spouse'; and the question on frequency, 'How many times do you generally have sex with your spouse?', where 52 per cent of the men, but only 27 per cent of the women, claimed, 'More than three times a week'. It appears that the gender-wise perceptions are seriously divergent here, provoking the editor to comment, 'The men and women are at odds with each other, not just in the act but also in attitude, creating an unequal partnership where there should be comfort-giving compatibility.'[42]

Enough of this tedious detail (51 questions, 9 variables, multiple options, all industriously tabulated on a vast spreadsheet), but some comment is required on the questions themselves. Unlike an academic report, which usually explains (on the basis of the conventional 'review of literature') the hypotheses being investigated, the *India Today* survey positioned itself merely as an empirical investigation of the current state of married love in India, with a view to discerning emerging trends. The reader is thus left to guess for her/himself the sources and motivations behind the questions that were offered to the respondents under the 'forced choice' model.

First, some questions were asymmetrical — questions asked only of men or of women (four each of the total of 51, of which one, about same-sex parties at home, was reciprocal). To give one example, *only* husbands, but *not* their wives, were asked whether they believed it to be their 'right' to have sex with their partners, and their strongly positive answers (76 per cent) led the analysts to hypothesize a high incidence of marital rape and forced sex in Indian marriages. But this almost foregone conclusion was compromised by the answers to an explicit question on 'forced sex', put to *both* men *and* women, which had equal numbers of both (84 per cent in all) stating that they had often or sometimes been 'forced' to have sex. (Put together, the responses would seem to indicate that, practically speaking, both husbands and wives routinely forced themselves on reluctant partners, though only husbands enjoyed cultural legitimacy in so doing.[43])

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[42] See http://indiatoday.digitaltoday.in/content_mail.php?option=com_content&name=print&id=1667 (accessed 12 February 2009).

Second, a number of the questions were leading questions, betraying unattractive, pre-formed gender stereotypes. Reference has already been made, for instance, to the questions of whether or not 'working women' were likely to be sexually more liberated than housewives, and whose married life was more satisfying.[44] There is also an underlying assumption in the questions, not very well confirmed in the data (which in fact appeared to attest to a rather reasonable level of marital satisfaction, at least by global standards), that the institution of marriage is at risk because of the inevitable flagging of sexual energies, lack of variety, and general routinization. Husbands were tactfully asked (separately) whether they found their wives less attractive after childbirth, and couples were probed on the question of whether interest in sex had diminished after the birth of children; also on what they did, or thought they might like to do, to 'revitalize' their marriages (with some helpful suggestions to choose from); and how often and with whom they took vacations. (The latter question, incidentally, yielded the information that, in the majority of the cases, children, parents, in-laws, both parents and in-laws, and friends and colleagues went along too!)

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[43] In an earlier article on the constructions of sexuality in the context of the impotency clauses of contemporary marriage law, I have argued that the 'judicial ethnosexology' in fact endorses the idea of a wife's 'right' to married sex and to motherhood (Uberoi 1996b).

[44] Indeed, the working/non-working independent variable incites voyeuristic speculation on all aspects of the working woman's sex life.

Third, some questions appeared to be simply transposed from the literature of global sexology. Or perhaps they sought merely to probe the porn-saturated middle-class imagination.[45] Other features of global erotica (sado-masochism and paedophilia, for instance, which Kinsey lushly documented) were politely sidestepped.[46]

Fourth, there were also a number of questions that appeared rather tangential. Someone, for some reason, thought it important to ask *only* women : 'Do you generally have morning tea/dinner in night clothes?' Is this — at last — an authentically 'Indian' touch? (Perhaps the answer depends on the definition of 'night clothes'.)

While readers typically either praised the survey for its bold fact-finding (cf. Kapila 2011) or else condemned it as incitement to promiscuity, the invited commentators on the *India Today* 2007 survey reacted variously. The editor interpreted the survey results as an indication of gender inequality in the bedroom; Priya Sarakkai Chabria, a poet and novelist, saw the survey as a reflection of the severe crisis of contemporary marriage, to be remedied by companionate togetherness; feminist lawyer Flavia Agnes dilated on the history of adultery as a grounds for divorce; newly married publisher Jaya Bhattacharji Rose wrote of the immense pressures in Indian society to get married, and the liberating role of Internet matchmaking portals in allowing couples to meet and court without family and friends breathing down their necks; women's health activist Puneet Bedi condemned the hypocrisy of bourgeois monogamous marriage (given man's 'natural' instinct to wander), though he ultimately concluded that people in monogamous marital relationships are in fact 'mentally' very healthy; Purvi Malhotra, a senior *India Today* journalist, discussed the importance of 'adjustment' and tolerance in marriage. I, totally at a loss for words, hid myself behind the formidable Professor G. S. Ghurye!

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[45] Indeed, the 2004 and 2006 male sexuality studies, as well as the subsequent surveys in 2008 and 2009 did seem to indicate the ready availability and use of global pornographic materials quite different from the 'pavement' pornography that Sanjay Srivastava has analyzed (2007).

[46] The 2009 *India Today* 'Fantasy Report', however, asked questions on sexual fantasy in general, and rape fantasy and 'bondage sex' in particular.

Professor G. S. Ghurye's pioneering survey (1938)

As head of the Sociology Department of Bombay University during the period 1924–59 and founder of the Indian Sociological Society and its journal, *Sociological Bulletin*, G. S. Ghurye was a major figure in the institutionalization of sociology in India well into the post-Independence period. Known as a fine Sanskrit scholar, he was also a dyed-in-the-wool empiricist, who strongly emphasized the importance of field-based research. Ghurye's pioneering investigation of the 'Sex Habits of a Sample of Middle Class People of Bombay' was reported at the 2nd All-India Population and 1st Family Hygiene Conference held in Bombay in 1938, and published in the Conference Report.[47] The larger ambience, as the occasion suggests, was the scientific interest and public curiosity generated by Havelock Ellis's *Psychology of Sex* (1946 [1933]) and the works of the American human biologist–eugenicist Raymond Pearl, and, on the other hand, by the well-publicized writings of birth-control advocates like Marie Stopes and Margaret Sanger, as well as the public controversies provoked by Katherine Mayo's notorious *Mother India* (2000 [1927]). This double invocation of 'science' and 'family hygiene' provided the legitimation for empirically probing an otherwise tabooed subject (cf. Mazzarella 2003).[48]

While eliciting information on birth control (and its 'failure'), number of children, intervals between births and age at marriage and consummation — all the basics of routine 'family health' surveys — Ghurye's explicit rationale for his study was somewhat more opaque. Beginning with the statement that '[A] study of sex habits is necessary for a comprehensive psychology of sex', Ghurye goes on to position his work in the context of a conundrum which many critics place at the heart of the science of sexology (cf. Tiefer 2000: 81). This is the tension between the universals of human biology, and the recognition of cultural and social differences in sexual behaviour, for instance, in the frequency of coition, which in turn may be correlated with fertility rates (Ghurye 1973: 287). This question of 'group-differences' in sexual behaviour — which today one might script as the role of 'culture' (cf. A. Basu 1993) — had hardly been investigated, according to Ghurye, and 'no such study regarding any section of [the] Indian population has been so far available' (ibid.: 288).

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[47] A chance inquiry in 1968 from a researcher at a regional family planning centre had persuaded Ghurye to republish the piece in a collection of his essays entitled *I and Other Explorations* (1973), which also includes his querulous autobiography.

[48] The goal of population control — coded as questions on 'contraception' — continues to give legitimacy to the investigation of Indian sexuality, while 'family hygiene' is re-coded as 'sexual health' in the context of HIV/AIDS. Thus the *India Today* 2007 survey includes a number of questions on the use of contraception and condoms, on sexual preference and experience, and on extramarital relationships.

As with today's surveys, Professor Ghurye laid much stress on 'methodology'. After all, it was important for him to demonstrate that his inquiry was motivated by scientific, and not merely prurient, interest. Confidentiality was assured the respondents, one of whom in fact regretted that a schedule on such 'a very vital issue' was so short. Assisted by second- and third-year students and by his friends, some 2,000 questionnaires were distributed to middle-class men in Bombay city, resulting, after 'repeated calls', in 311 responses from Hindu males.[49] Seven of these, Ghurye conceded, had to be rejected because the answers were defective or self-contradictory, 'or because the desire of the person replying to crack jokes was apparent' (Ghurye1973: 288). Altogether, the response rate was not encouraging, a fact which, again, might raise questions regarding methodology,[50] but Ghurye pressed on with his investigation regardless.

Though Professor Ghurye's report referred to the sex habits of 'middle-class *people*', in fact, he interviewed only *men*, and only *Hindu* men at that.[51] Today, of course, women too are surveyed, and one of the interesting aspects of the 2007 *India Today* survey, as remarked earlier, is the discrepancy in the responses of husbands and wives. Compared to today's lengthy multi-question, multi-option but

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[49] In other words, the sample was elicited, effectively, through the 'snowballing' technique, one of the less satisfactory methods of sampling often resorted to when the subject matter is delicate (see Davidson and Layder 1994: 95).

[50] The problem of the self-selected sample (cf. Kapila 2011).

[51] However, as noted in Footnote 41, contemporary surveys do not code religious affiliation, for whatever reasons.

'forced choice' survey schedules, which condemn all doubts and prevarications to the 'don't know'/'can't say' category, Ghurye's survey was remarkably concise: just 13 questions in all, albeit some of them open-ended. The first five requested basic demographic information on the age of husband and wife, the year of their marriage, and their education levels and occupations.[52] Ghurye's sixth question concerned the institution of the honeymoon, since this was 'not a Hindu practice but an idea that is latterly presented to us through the medium of English literature'.[53] The final three questions requested information on birth control (#11), the failure of birth-control methods (#12), and the total number of children born, the intervals between their births, and those born 'in spite of . . . [the] practice of birth control' (#13). Notwithstanding Ghurye's initial presentation of his report at a conference on population and family hygiene, it is remarkable that he *completely neglected* to comment on the fertility data.

There were four questions, however, on which Ghurye lavished extravagant attention in his attempt to understand the cultural parameters and meanings of Indian sexuality as a variety of human sexual response. It is in these highly motivated questions, and Ghurye's reflections upon the responses he received, that one can appreciate some major differences between sexology then and now. These were:

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[52] For its day, the sample was highly educated, with many husbands being matriculates, graduates, post-graduates or professionals, employed as clerks, teachers, lawyers, doctors and engineers, with a sizable number also of independent businessmen. The wives of the respondents were much less educated — almost half of them had studied only to the 4th grade of 'vernacular' schools — but 90 had had some English education. Nonetheless, all except eight of the 304 wives were housewives.

[53] Even then, Ghurye was interested in the observation that some 34 persons, most of them well-educated, had had a honeymoon (Ghurye 1973: 292). The role of the English language as a class discriminator, related to the construction of sexual self-identities, is still unexplored. Balachandran (2004: 185) notes that the sexual identity of homosocial individuals in Bangalore is constructed 'along class lines', determined not so much by economic status as by 'their language of discourse' (English *versus* the vernaculars). Note that the surveys discussed in this essay all appear to have been conducted in English.

(#7) Did you begin cohabitation with your wife from the day of marriage or was there an interval? (If an interval, state how long it was.)
(#8) Do you live apart from your wife for any period during a year either on business or because your wife goes to her parent or on any other ground? (If so, state period.)
(#9) How often in a month do you have sex-intercourse with your wife? State the number of times in a month and also the number of times in any night if you copulate with your wife more often than once in a night.
(10) If you are temporarily separated from your wife for reasons under #8, do you find any change in [the] frequency of your sex-intercourse after reunion? (If so, state its strength and also the period over which the change lasts.)

With the exception of the first part of the 'frequency'-related question (#9), none of these questions finds a place in *India Today*'s elaborate questionnaire of 2007 on marital sex. Clearly, Ghurye had something in mind when he posed these very precise yet open-ended questions. And clearly there is something to be explained not only about the differences between cultures, but about the differences between then and now.

Intimacy, then and now

Very different in scope and range, Ghurye's survey and the 2007 *India Today* survey of married sex both focus on the educated middle class as the vanguard of social change.[54] As might be expected after a 70-year interval, there are differences in the outcomes of the two surveys but, interestingly, these are not symmetrical with the now-routine contrasts of sexual attitudes and behaviour before and after economic liberalization, coded as a transition from repression to liberation.

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[54] Ghurye did not explicitly define 'middle class', but described his sample with reference to his respondents' occupations (mostly white-collar, professional or business) and relatedly, their educational levels (high, for their times). Contemporary surveys place greater emphasis on income levels, or ownership of consumer durables (see Deshpande 2003: Chapter 6).

A big difference between then and now, from which much else flows, is the age of marriage of middle-class women. In Ghurye's 1938 survey, over 17 per cent of the women were married at age 13 or below, with the average age of marriage being just 16.2 years, and their husbands being more than eight years older, averaging 24.5 years. Given the contemporary social-reform discourse on the evils of child marriage, and the implied correlation between immature marriage and higher maternal and infant mortality, one thrust of Ghurye's survey was to determine the average gap between marriage and the beginning of conjugal sex life in his middle-class sample. In Ghurye's account, while almost 60 per cent of the couples initiated sexual relations in the first three months of marriage, the others (and, significantly, not only the immature couples among them) took their time — up to 14 years in one notable instance. By contrast, in the 2007 *India Today* sex-survey sample, women were on average 22 at marriage, their husbands being some three and a half years older. In their case it appears to have been assumed that sexual relations followed — in the natural course or by the husband's exercise of his 'right' — very soon after marriage. No explicit question was therefore asked on this issue in 2007, or in the other *India Today* surveys, as far as I could ascertain (though the question remains prominent in state-sponsored fertility surveys).

A second and obvious difference between then and now is the great expansion of space for *sexual pleasure* (cf. Kapila 2011; Mazzarella 2003), to which many of the contemporary interview questions point: questions on foreplay, on coital positions, on fantasies and desire, on sex-toys and porn, and on strategies for revitalizing flagging conjugal energies. On the contrary, for many of Ghurye's subjects, as he faithfully recorded, the frequency of coitus was something that was to be sternly governed by self-imposed rules of conduct (whether, e.g., coitus every day; every other day; for a few days in succession followed by a gap of some days; every alternate day beginning a week after the end of the wife's period; or only on auspicious days of the month, generally numbering about five) (Ghurye 1973: 299–300). In other words, coitus, whether frequent or sparse, was seen as having something to do with the exercise of autonomy and (male) self-restraint, maybe even with a sense of duty, more than with spontaneity, self-expression, instinct, or passion. One young man, Professor Ghurye recorded:

> [a] teacher, who is an M.A. and married for over 4 years, has coitus every night but is thinking of lessening the frequency to once a week. He laments that both he and his wife are unable to take to this new rule as they cannot control themselves, he more than his wife. He further regrets that owing to the habit of masturbation he has very little control over his passion. He used to get excited sometimes at the sight of a lady so much as to have discharge. This lack of control, he further regrets, has told both on his career and health. (Ghurye 1973: 300)

Not unexpectedly, today's surveys give no hint of the Hindu moral value of *abstinence*, encoded in the teacher's wavering resolve. Assuming the 'pleasure principle' *ipso facto*, they do not countenance the idea that controlled abstinence and self-restraint might actually enhance sexual pleasure and make for better sex.

In Professor Ghurye's account, one material fact of life that posed a challenge to theory, methodology and statistical analysis was the occurrence of the wife's monthly period. To begin with, marital relations could not be initiated until after the wife's puberty. But even after puberty, Professor Ghurye hypothesized that the unexplained delay in consummation in some cases might be accounted for by the 'vestiges of old custom' whereby, 'according to the orthodox Hindu custom, sex-life can be begun only during the first 16 days of the monthly period' (Ghurye 1973: 291). Thereafter, the taboo on sex during menstruation left only 24 days or three and a half weeks from which to estimate the monthly frequency of intercourse. Coming up with an average monthly coital frequency of 10.2 (excluding the exceptional case of a couple who had intercourse only once or twice a year), Professor Ghurye urged that this figure, based on present practice, must be treated as an underestimate, for many of his respondents had apparently spoken wistfully of higher levels of performance in their 'younger days'.

Be that as it may, it seems that these days neither the scientific community nor the wider public wishes to be reminded of nature's feminine rhythms. Contemporary surveys make no mention of this simple, material fact of life, however prominent it might be in the real-life coital calculations of married couples, let alone of the consequences for conjugal libido of lactational amenorrhoea or of menopause. Sexual liberation in the new millennium is constrained by the fact that there are even today some topics that are, or rather, have in fact *newly become*, distasteful and prudishly unmentionable.

Unanticipated in his opening statement of purpose, two questions seemed to have interested Professor Ghurye especially. His parsimonious questionnaire probed them explicitly, and his analyses were extravagantly detailed. (By contrast, as noted earlier, he completely forgot to tabulate the information from his three questions on birth control!) The first was the 'living apart of husband and wife for some time as a routine practice' which, according to Professor Ghurye, was an aspect of 'the Hindu way of living'. The second, on which he lavished much attention, was the prevalence of 'multiple coitus'. More than 50 per cent of those who answered the latter question admitted to (or rather, boasted of) multiple coitus, in the early days of marriage and, in some cases, continuing even at the time of the survey, some 12 per cent claiming coitus between two and six times a night and, in one 'stud' case, eight times. Here, once again, the good professor was confronted with theoretical, methodological and statistical dilemmas. Do overall estimates of the frequency of coitus include counts of multiple coitus? Apparently not. Is there a seasonal variation in sexual frequency and multiple coitus? Maybe yes, winter being more conducive than summer, according to at least one informant. Is the educational level or the occupation of the practitioners of multiple coitus at all significant? It didn't seem so. And, most important of all, do those who regularly engage in multiple coitus routinely have sex on more days in the month as well? Indeed, they did.

Actually, it seems that Professor Ghurye's two preoccupations — the 'living apart of husband and wife for some time as routine practice' and the phenomenon of multiple coitus — were intimately related. 'Sexologists', he claimed, though he refrained from naming them, 'would seem to agree that . . . temporary separation as a periodic practice is conducive to married happiness' (Ghurye 1973: 292). In fact, a large number of his subjects who had been separated from their wives for varying periods of time noted a positive change in the frequency of coitus. Many of them attested, in graphic detail, to 'gushing' desire and multiple coitus, 'even during daytime'. In a particularly analytical self-reflection, one subject — 'a pleader', who had recently moved to a separate bed from his wife — testified to the reduced frequency but distinctly greater pleasure of intercourse that was, on this account, no longer just a 'routine affair'.

For whatever reason, on which one can only speculate here, neither the benefits of temporary separation nor the preoccupation with multiple coitus find a place in the 2007 *India Today* survey of conjugal sexuality. All of this might lead one to conclude either that the times have really changed, 70 years on; that the good professor had his quirks; or that maximum togetherness may not, after all, be the secret of marital bliss.

The sexual character of the Indian middle class

But let us not be distracted by the intimate details, and no doubt often spurious facticity, of the two sex surveys we have discussed in this essay, spanning some 70 years of India's modern history from colonial to postcolonial times. Taken together, and in line with Michel Foucault's arguments in the introductory volume of *The History of Sexuality* (1981), they reveal no clear historical trajectory of sex-talk from Victorian repression to *fin de siècle* sexual liberation. Rather, there is a subtle realignment of focus in the generation of sexual knowledge, with a rich panoply of features of sexual behaviour and intimate relations now opened up to public scrutiny, along with a curious redistribution of the 'sayable' and the 'un-sayable' in regard to the sexual fantasies and behaviour of middle-class Indians.

It is in keeping with the vanguard, modernizing role of the Indian middle class (Deshpande 2003: Chapter 6) that both surveys lay claim to the authority of modern science, the scientific method and techniques of statistical analysis to explore a supposedly taboo subject and present their findings in the public domain — in Professor Ghurye's case, to a gathering of experts on population and 'social hygiene', and in the case of the 2007 *India Today* sex survey, to a vast countrywide, indeed international, readership. Seven decades apart, this sex-talk in the language of science was claimed as a gesture of public enlightenment. In both cases, the audience was (broadly defined) the educated, urban middle class, and it was the sexual behaviour of this same class that was the object of narcissistic fascination, if not also of anxiety. In turn, at least in the case of the widely-publicized contemporary sex surveys, the survey procedures and findings function to instantiate new norms, and perhaps quite unrealistic expectations, in the domain of private life.

Focused on the sexual behaviour of the Indian middle classes, the two sex surveys also stand as discriminators of class status, albeit provocatively modulated by the geography of regional and metropolitan location. For G. S. Ghurye in the late 1930s, the sexual modernity of the emerging Bombay middle class had already begun to assume a hybrid character, with the new institution of the 'honeymoon' rubbing against the 'vestiges of old custom'. Ghurye clearly thought it important to scientifically document this hybridity as a means to understanding both the universals and the cultural ('group') particularities of human sexual behaviour. As we have seen, the professor had his own hunches in this regard, based on his formidable knowledge of Hindu religious texts and rituals and his consummate mastery of subcontinental ethnology.

With the *India Today* new millennial surveys and their ilk, Indian middle-class sexuality is surveyed and evaluated in line with global templates, with minor adjustments in the survey schedule to allow recognition of some of the specificities of Indian social life (the institutions of 'arranged marriage' and 'joint family', for instance). With the Indian middle classes now defined primarily in terms of their capacity for consumption (see Baviskar and Ray, this volume), and their lifestyle aspirations forged by global consumerism, features of sexual behaviour and fantasy have metamorphosed into items of delectation in a smorgasbord of individual choices. Faced with this feast of carnal possibilities, the continued sexual conservatism of the Indian middle class, is cause for remark, if not also for regret. As Kaveree Bamzai summed up the findings of the 2009 *India Today* 'Fantasy Report', in which a large majority of the respondents chose to 'fantasize' about having sex 'in the bedroom' and with their spouses, rather than with other persons 'under a waterfall', 'on a rooftop', 'in a heritage monument', or 'on the office desk', among other options:[55]

> Urban Indians emerge as cautious tourists, not fearless adventurers, in a new universe of fantasy. . . . The technology of fantasy has expanded dramatically allowing urban Indians access to a supermarket of choices, but all it has done is expand information, not intimacy.[56]

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[55] 'The Fantasy Report', *India Today* Sex Survey 2009, 7 December 2009, pp. 58–59.

[56] Ibid., p. 29.

Acknowledgements

This essay had its origin in an 'expert' comment on the 2007 *India Today* Sex Survey (see Footnote 18), and was reworked for presentation at the workshop on 'India, Sexuality and the Archive' held at Duke University, NC, 13 February 2009. I am grateful to co-participants in the workshop, and to the Duke University–University of North Carolina Nannerl O. Keohane Visiting Professorship programme which enabled my access to the excellent library resources of the University of North Carolina. The title of my essay plays on that of a well-known piece by sociologist André Béteille (Béteille 2001).

12

Privatization, Profit and the Public: The Consequences of Neoliberal Reforms on Working Lives

Ruchira Ganguly-Scrase **and**
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Introduction

Neoliberal approaches have become the new orthodoxy in development (Brohman 1995; Fourcade-Gourinchas and Babb 2002; Portes 1997; Robison 2006). The resurrection and hegemony of market-driven approaches identify state intervention as inefficient and counterproductive, and call for developing countries to privatize state-owned enterprises, adopt a range of stabilization measures to address the balance of payment crises, and limit public expenditure. The unswerving faith in liberalization policies as the solution for the overall improvement of the standard of living of the population underpins the Indian state's rationale for forging ahead with economic reforms. While the positive consequences of the reforms for the 'new rich' are amply evident, how other segments of the middle classes, especially those shaped by regional cultures, confront, challenge or acquiesce to the shifts in the non-interventionist approaches of governments in economic and social arenas remains relatively unexplored. Based on fieldwork among 'lower middle-class' households in West Bengal, this essay examines the concrete experiences of those affected by these policies, and thereby accounts for the everyday experiences, understandings and practices of this particular group. The emphasis in this essay is on interrogating the effects of neoliberal reforms and the impact of changing workplaces on the lives of people.

Sociologists have critiqued the elasticity of the category of 'middle class' in the context of the liberalization of the Indian economy (e.g., Lakha 1999) and have noted the differentiation of the middle classes (Deshpande 2003). In rapidly changing societies, it may be useful to think about these groups as class fractions rather than a single unified class (Sen and Stivens 1998: 15). The diversity within the middle classes is a reminder that class is about inequality. Our aim was to understand how this is being experienced and lived by people.[1] Our respondents in West Bengal belong to a particular economic bracket and cultural milieu. Their average household income at the start of our fieldwork in 1999 was just under ₹ 10,000 per month, and in the course of the research that figure nearly doubled. In terms of culture, this group forms part of the Bengali *bhadralok* (traditionally, the Bengali middle class), whose historical significance has been noted by many writers. Unlike their original position as a reasonably well-off, educated and highly cultured status group, the bhadralok are now a heterogeneous group and may be indigent. The economic reality of the present has meant that education and cultural pursuits, their traditional status symbols, are now not enough to maintain their status position. Over the past decade or so the entrepreneurial and moneyed upper middle class has expanded in West Bengal and so, as in other major urban centres in India, conspicuous consumption has increasingly become an important determinant of status. Our informants constantly pointed out that they were not well-off, that they felt increasing financial pressures, and that their lives were far removed from the lives of the entrepreneurial and upper middle class — the 'new rich' of India. Moreover, the elements fundamental to middle-class cultural capital are being redefined along with the changing economy. Increasingly, financial capital is being used to acquire an English-medium private education, to send a child abroad for university education, and so to build one's stock of cultural capital.[2] In contrast, the trajectories of many of our respondents' lives have been associated with the downward mobility of the bhadralok that began several decades ago following the partition of Bengal and which now has been exacerbated under neoliberal reforms. Many had struggled to attain enough education to obtain employment in the public sector, but now increasingly feel squeezed out. Initially adopting the rhetoric of being opposed to market reforms, the Left

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[1] For a detailed discussion and analysis of the impact of neoliberal policies on the lives of the Bengali lower middle classes, see Ganguly-Scrase and Scrase (2009).

[2] This raises the spectre of middle-class cultural politics, which we explore in the following paragraphs.

Front government has now become vociferous in its attempt to attract foreign transnational corporations (TNCs) into the state.[3] The new market-oriented state ideology and economic reforms are confusing to many people. In this context, our essay addresses these concerns, especially when we analyse the views of public-sector workers who both bemoan privatization and workplace restructuring, yet see it as a challenge for themselves and their workplaces. Although widespread retrenchments are yet to occur, the threat looms large. What has captured peoples' imagination is the language of efficiency and productivity, which they deploy to reclaim their allegiance to the public sector. As such, as we argue more fully in the following sections, several of our informants are taking on the challenge that the liberalization of their workplace poses (more competitiveness, financial accountability, etc.), and so we would disagree with the observation, or, more correctly, the hypothesis, made by Sridharan (2004: 406) that those working in declining or protected industries may well be opposed to liberalization. Some are, but many are not.

Background

Intensive and intermittent fieldwork was conducted in Kolkata, the capital of West Bengal, and the town of Siliguri in north Bengal, from 1999 to 2005. A total of 120 people were interviewed (60 in each location). Among the respondents were 20 key informants, most of whom we had known for over a decade from our earlier research in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Women constituted 48 per cent of our sample, while men were 52 per cent. The overwhelming majority (85 per cent) was employed in the formal or organized sector of the labour force, while the rest 15 per cent were working in the so-called informal sector. When we had originally conceived and planned this research project, we estimated that there would be some notable differences in the views of those in greater Kolkata compared to those from the provincial town of Siliguri. However, this was not to be, highlighting for us the significance of a class-based cultural outlook irrespective of geographical distance. While our respondents consisted of clerks, lower professionals and administrators, and sales and service personnel, sociological attempts to operationalize class on the basis of occupational categories and income only partially explain their position. As noted above, these groups are best understood as class fractions. Neo-Marxist accounts shed some light on the social location of a marginal middle class consisting of non-manual wage earners and low-grade technicians (Wright 1985; Wright et al. 1989). Accordingly, they may be seen to be in a contradictory class location — semi-autonomous, professional employees situated somewhere between the proletariat and the petty bourgeoisie. Others have referred to this group as 'lower white-collar classes'.[4] We utilized these categories to specify the respondents' market capacity, and were particularly concerned with documenting their consumption and household survival strategies, which subsequently revealed their limited household budgets. However, as complex interlinkages of economic position, status and caste relations and the dynamics of political power continue to shape the formation of social classes in India, we do not claim that any of these definitions are completely adequate in analyzing class relations in West Bengal.[5]

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[3] West Bengal's shift in its New Industrial Policy (NIP) in 1994 was largely rhetorical. According to Pedersen (2001), the Left Front had been attempting to woo investors to come to the state since 1979, on mutually advantageous terms. Still, the contradictions in this stance were evident, since throughout the 1980s the Left Front had consistently mobilized against the liberalization policies of the Rajiv Gandhi-led central government. For Pedersen, the real change evident in the NIP was that the Left Front was now openly advocating economic development using market forces.

We first relied on the self-ascription of our informants, which was sometimes couched in terms of being lower middle-class. Indeed, when describing themselves in that way, respondents tended to use the English term, although some used the Bengali term *nimno moddhobitto* (lower middle-class) to depict their neighbourhoods. This occurred especially when they intended to describe their surroundings in a self-deprecating way or to signify a fall from grace. We believe that our focus on the lower middle class is a significant departure from other studies of emerging middle-class groups that have been carried out in recent years, and view it as the central distinguishing feature of our study. Presenting a striking contrast to the real poor, other terms our informants used were 'ordinary folk', or 'common folk', or 'people of limited means'. People invariably described their situation, or their lifestyles, as 'normal' although, in the reality of India and its social hierarchies, they were in fact relatively privileged. What is distinctive is their subtle awareness of the internal class divisions and their distancing of themselves from the wealthy or rich. Some simply described themselves as 'those dependent on a salary'. The image of a regular salary earner is a powerful one in Bengali culture, which suggests a distinction from menial wage work as well as earnings from trade. However, it also disguises the real incomes of those civil servants who supplement their total household income by taking bribes.[6] During our fieldwork no one claimed that they were poor, despite their lack of material wealth.

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[4] In the neo-Weberian stratification model developed by Goldthorpe and Hope (1974) following the seven-fold (seven) scales, this group forms part of Class II (lower professionals; technicians; lower administrators; small business managers; supervisors of non-manual workers) and Class III (clerks; sales personnel).

[5] For earlier accounts of class formation based on detailed household statistical data, participant observation and case studies, see T. Chatterjee (1979: 1–31) and Bardhan (1982).

Research findings

Mutually suspicious views existed among public- and private-sector employees. In terms of where they worked, 69 per cent of the respondents were in the government sector, 26 per cent in formal private work and five per cent worked in semi-government undertakings. Public-sector workers equated the private sector with insecurity and exploitation, while some within the formal private sector assumed that their counterparts within the public sector lacked work discipline. Such perceptions were rarely grounded in experience or knowledge of the other side. While some views of those working within the private sector were largely shaped by media discourses, the public-sector workers' critiques were by and large centred on the practices of small firms that lack the protection of government employment. Beyond these extremes were a number of differing positions mediated by several factors: the generational divide; public-sector workers' own assertions of the need to be more efficient; and the critical consciousness of highly politicized workers. The world-views of this last group were informed by class analysis, and subsequently presented us with a critique of the ethos of market citizenship in which the disadvantages stemming from privatization and deregulation are disadvantages not just to oneself, but to others as well. These conflicting sentiments are explored below.

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[6] We also note that none of our respondents declared income from rent.

(i) Privation and the ideology of private enterprise

An overwhelming majority (60 per cent) of the respondents disputed that privatization could bring many benefits to people in West Bengal. Their view is directly related to their attitudes towards the nature of the private sector. Quite a few people (17 per cent) argued that privatization would lead to the loss of jobs and contribute to growing unemployment. Some argued that the advantages of privatization of a state enterprise were confined to those in managerial, professional and high-tech positions. For many lower middle-class people, 'private' was almost always synonymous with small-scale firms. Any attempt on our behalf to steer the conversation towards the practices of larger or more formal-sector firms was usually met with very little success. In his analysis of economic statistics and trends, Sridharan notes that the privatization of public-sector enterprises has remained largely a threat rather than an actuality in India over the past decade or so, with 'only a marginal fall in total public employment, largely due to recruitment freezes and voluntary retirement schemes, and barely half a dozen central public enterprises have been truly privatized' (Sridharan 2004: 425).

Invariably, our informants would lead us to a discussion of the vagaries of the so-called informal sector: low salaries, little or no job security, and the lack of any well-founded labour protection laws. Insecurity and uncertainty in the organizations that were a part of this sector was the basis for rejecting privatization. The majority of those employed in the 'unorganized' sector had little awareness of the work practices of TNCs or even of large private companies like the Tata Corporation. Many government employees were similarly unaware of employee benefits offered in large corporations, other than the high salaries offered to upper professionals. If these government employees lose their jobs, then it is more than likely that they will end up employed in the unprotected small-scale private sector. Although the senior executives we spoke with often bemoaned the lack of qualified skilled labour, our respondents had not considered this training as an option for their children's future. Among lower middle-class households, white-collar work in secure government jobs continues to be much coveted. Given their current level of education and skills, the alternative of manual unskilled work is unthinkable for them; such work is the only marker of status differential of the lower middle classes (our respondents) from the poor. Such deeply held social and cultural meanings also underlie their reasons for slighting privatization. A perceived low status of such enterprises within their families points to a preference for a government position, considered to hold a special status. Our respondents appealed for continued government intervention, without which they feared job losses. Some were well aware that given their level of education and training, it was unlikely that they would gain entry into positions in major companies or TNCs.

Many government employees often compared the callous attitude of the private sector with the compassionate nature of the state. Although it was young people who most readily embraced privatization and positive views of the private sector, when they directly confronted some of its deleterious effects, they became its trenchant critics. The daughter of a postal clerk, herself a policewoman, noted,

> In the police department, if I work I will definitely receive my salary, whereas a private firm can be closed all of a sudden. Then the payments are stopped; there are clashes between labour and the owners in private firms. It makes me furious when we get complaints from the daily wage earners that they are turned out without payments by the owners.

One respondent, a junior reference assistant at the National Library, applied a striking metaphor of blood donation to the public sector, positioning civil servants as blood donors. The demise of the public sector implied society's denial of their contributions:

> We cannot privatize everything. For example, those who donate blood to save lives of others . . . it is unfair to let them go without acknowledging their contribution. Similarly, this place is giving every drop of blood to create the brainpower of tomorrow. That is, it is preparing the future generations. At first glance, it may not seem financially feasible since this process costs a lot of money, doesn't it? But its future rewards are unquantifiable.

In reflecting on the range of views concerning privatization, a number of binary oppositions can be seen characterizing the respondents' evaluations of state and private enterprises. Almost all state employees, and even many working in the private sector, made stark comparisons between the culture and ethos of the state-owned enterprises and private workplaces. While the former were characterized by universal rules and as being for the benefit of all, the latter were entirely driven by profit motives and left to the vagaries of their owners and managers. Other oppositions that can be identified are presented in Table 12.1.

Table 12.1: Perceptions of State and Private Enterprises

State	*Private*
Impartial	Personality-driven
Neutral	Arbitrary
Merciful	Authoritarian
Freedom	Surveillance
Benefit for all	Profit motive

These views stand in marked contrast to the image of the developmental state as oppressive. For instance, the idea of working for profit, or of government enterprises being 'profitable', was anathema to many of our informants who saw government service as a public duty. Like those appealing to its reservation (affirmative-action) principles, our respondents staked their claims to the public sector, which they held in deep regard. Their identities were tied up with working in it. Parents continually reinforced the importance of the public sector to their children. The objectivity and open-minded nature of government bureaucrats were compared to the personal whims of employers in private enterprises. From the perspective of low-ranking clerical employees, personal vendettas of owners and managers and the absence of autonomy in private enterprises were common concerns. Typical responses included:

> Someone is always looking over your shoulder. I suppose we are relieved of that kind of authoritarian outlook in our semi-governmental and cooperative set-up here. (Woman, aged 48, Purchasing Assistant, textile cooperative)

> In private organizations you can sack an employee according to the proprietor's whim. It may have nothing to do with the performance of the employee. In government jobs unless you have done anything illegal, you cannot be got rid of like that. (Woman, aged 51, Lower Division Clerk, Reserve Bank of India)

Asserting that IMF clauses on adjustment were farcical, a number of key informants argued that economic liberalization was a policy choice engineered entirely by powerful classes and that the government of the day had proceeded in an undemocratic fashion to implement it. This assertion was repeatedly made, emphasizing the distinction between their own position within the class structure and that of a powerful bureaucratic elite. A corollary to this argument was that only the powerful classes benefited from the reforms. However, others countered the claims of citizens being excluded from the decision-making process by arguing that the reforms had not been implemented according to their original plans. These conflicting perspectives were primarily determined by their respective location in the public and the private sectors. Optimistic about liberalization, a number of formal private sector workers felt the ethos of hard work and efficiency inherent in the private sector should prevail among government employees. To put it another way, the current misery of the latter was attributed to their own failure. It goes without saying that such unforgiving attitudes are partly the result of never having worked in a public institution, and have been further reinforced by relentless media commentaries on state inefficiency and increased calls for worker responsibility, punctuality and service quality (see McLean 2001).

Neoliberalism associates 'efficiency' with the private sector (Bourdieu et al. 1999). In recent years, the positive appraisal of private enterprise for its dynamism, initiative and offer of incentives has captured the public imagination and has come to dominate public opinion. Here, employees are extolled for their virtues of punctuality, diligence, dedication, and enthusiasm. The public sector is its obverse: bureaucratic and unproductive, its workers lethargic. Among our respondents, advocates of private-sector efficiency included workers from large private corporations, private-school teachers, a handful of highly qualified civil servants, and young people in general. The popularly held opinions concerning government employees, particularly their tendencies to skive off, were universal. More often than not, pre-existing disdainful attitudes towards public-sector workers underpinned the assessment and assumptions of these respondents. Typically, they had never worked nor had intended to obtain employment in the public sector. The case study of a tertiary-educated single woman in her mid-thirties most vividly illustrates some of these preconceived ideas. Tulika currently does freelance project work. Her family's income is over

₹ 30,000 per month, which is well outside the income range of our respondents. However, we have included a lengthy account of her views because they are illustrative of households whose incomes have risen, who typify the middle-class aspirants of liberalization whom the media relentlessly promotes. This family's fortunes have indeed improved, but their condition was far from comfortable in the past. Fifteen years ago, during Tulika's early 20s, the family faced a calamity, with both her father and his elder brother dying suddenly. As the eldest child, it was left to her to find employment. As she explained, 'My mother said to me, "try to find a job — something in the technical area, perhaps. The other children are still studying. You've got to do something"'. The following lengthy account of a conversation during an interview exemplifies our argument:

Question (Q): So, what did you do? Was there any chance of a government job?

Tulika (T): Never! I was going to sit for the WBCS [West Bengal Civil Services examinations]. But then . . . well, I looked at the government offices. They are filthy; dirty files everywhere; filthy walls, betelnut spit stains on the walls. Horrible! It is the opposite in a private firm. Clean offices, nice neat reception area. People are polite. No, I've never been interested in getting a government job.

Q: Do you still feel the same way?

T: Most definitely! You go and stand there and no one even asks you to take a seat. It is like they are doing you a favour. It is their job to help the public — aren't they public servants?

Q: What about your friends and other family members? Do they have a different opinion about government employment?

T: Most of my friends are in the private sector, in the corporate sector, in newspapers. In their opinion privatization is a good thing. In this country people don't work in the public sector; there is a lack of a work culture. What a strange thing! I mean you draw a salary and you don't want to work? Everyday there is 'this meeting' or 'that rally'. Hopeless.

Q: Do you know many people who go to protest rallies? Would you say this would be a majority of workers?

T: Er . . . yes, only a minority . . .

Q: How do you think privatization has affected the rest? Most of the population doesn't work in the public sector.

T: How do you mean the rest?

Q: I mean those people who don't have a regular salary, like, you know, the entire informal sector.

T: Yes, some people work in casual jobs, part-time jobs. They work until six in the evening. And then from six onwards, they might have another job. Yeah, it's like that.

Q: Do you feel we tend to get upset when we see government workers taking it easy? Maybe they got jobs at a time when you could get a government job. Do you ever see anything like that in the private sector?

T: No, no. Inefficient people just won't be able to get in. A person might be interviewed several times. There will be an IQ test. I've seen this with my own eyes. Forget English or shorthand or keyboarding skills. That is just taken for granted. Then you will have your interview. The panel will be very fussy, very selective about who they get. In government service you sit for the PSC or WBCS.[7] That's it. I am not talking about high-ranking posts, just ordinary jobs. After you are selected, there is no accountability.

While such predisposed negative opinions towards government employees illustrate the hostile attitudes of some private-sector workers, others were also highly critical of the idleness of government employees. For example, a devout Christian for whom working hard led to moral salvation explained:

> [T]he indiscipline that you find among government employees is completely absent in our workplace. Whenever I've had to deal with workers in government departments, whenever I've had to go to a government office, I have observed that they are always slacking off. The tendency for *phanki mara* [to loaf around] is highly prevalent among them. We cannot imagine that kind of behaviour here. To be here for nine hours doing nothing is unthinkable. They are doing this day after day. We cannot even sit around for one minute. (Male, mid-thirties, Senior Technical Assistant, large private corporation)

When asked whether he regarded this to be true of all government organizations, he replied, 'No, naturally not. But there are some offices which do not have any work culture whatsoever'. Older state employees endorsed similar criticisms of their own colleagues: 'The biggest problem with government employment is the opportunity for *phanki mara*. You can't do that in private enterprise!'

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[7] PSC is the Public Service Commission examination (in several states); WBCS is the West Bengal Civil Service examination.

To immerse oneself in one's work was a badge of honour for private-sector employees. Derisive of their counterparts in government service, many were at the same time resentful of the security they enjoyed. For example, when a clerk in a small accounting firm extolled the virtues of the private sector, we inquired whether the sector afforded many advantages. He simply said,

> I don't notice any such advantage. Rather, I feel that a government organization is better that way; it offers more security, more benefits than private organizations. However, may be *there are benefits for people who hold very high positions. For us, there are none.* (Graduate, Accounts Assistant, aged 38; emphasis in the original)

Here it is clear that the benefits of liberalization have not accrued to those at lower ranks; rather, there is a cynical recognition that the real beneficiaries have been the business proprietors, entrepreneurs and those in higher professional positions or in jobs that have expanded in the new economy (i.e., those in computer sales, marketing, management, etc.).

While private-sector workers dismissed their public-sector counterparts as lacking the qualities of diligence and punctuality, they were well aware of their own exploitative conditions, and resented them. Some were embittered by the shabby treatment they received from their firms. Despite outward praise for their own firms during formal interviews, at other times, in relaxed settings, the same people spoke about chronic insecurities, particularly in TNCs that were experiencing the global downturn and the pressure to relocate, restructure and rationalize. In one TNC, for example, employees had been living amidst uncertainty for the past couple of years. The corporation's global strategy was to transform the company by gradually shutting down some of its large manufacturing units, and to subcontract its production, while the parent company would be more involved in marketing. The management had not informed the employees of the full details of their future. During our fieldwork, most workers relied on the print media for information. At that time it was being speculated that an Indian company would take the corporation over. Stunned by the new developments, workers were anxious about whether they would retain their jobs and existing benefits. Apart from attractive salaries, workers enjoyed a number of entitlements — medical benefits, leave travel and dearness allowances, free lunch, crèche, transport allowance, and the company's own transport service for workers. For them, it was unthinkable that such a 'solid' company, in which some families had worked over two generations, could face the threat of closure. Rumours of the takeover created disquiet about the new management's commitment to honouring their existing facilities and conditions.

Contradictory attitudes towards the public sector also prevailed amongst teachers in private schools. While they continually asserted the superiority of their institutions over government schools, they were anxious to downplay the insecurities of their own jobs. Similar inconsistencies existed among public-sector workers as well. A minority claimed that their colleagues were idle. Therefore, they felt privatization would not be a bad idea, since it would enforce diligence. Some well-qualified workers remained ambivalent towards their colleagues, implying that public-sector workers did not work as hard as they should. Their ambivalence stemmed from their self-confidence as well-trained employees who felt immune from retrenchment. Since they had entered the posts through rigorous competition, they were quite sanguine about retaining their jobs, but were also mindful that many would lose their jobs if privatized. Unlike most workers in government organizations opposed to privatization due to a collectivist orientation, this group maintained an individualistic and technocratic approach to achieving efficiency in the public sector. However, a minority of well-qualified, public-sector workers acknowledged that full privatization would be detrimental to the vast majority of the population. For example, a number of administrative and clerical workers in the postal service felt that partial privatization was desirable in order to be more competitive. But while they were comfortable with the privatization of courier services, they saw it as essential to keep the price of postage stamps low for the general public. Similarly, a number of respondents from Doordarshan, the state television broadcasting corporation, who were its vigorous defenders for its important role as a socio-cultural institution, welcomed technological innovations which they felt would enhance professionalism in their divisions. Ideological influences of self-regulation were very strong among this group. We will consider further their adherence to the neoliberal ethos of self-regulation shortly.

It is evident that experiences within a given type of work setting have shaped the outlook of employees. Since these were largely value orientations difficult to quantify, we specifically explored the experiences of respondents who had initially worked in the private sector and then joined government service. In comparing both sectors, these respondents found that private-sector work was monotonous and offered no freedom. The latter was highly valued by many people. The absence of autonomy and freedom in private enterprise was at the heart of their critique. It was also a moral critique directed at the inherently profit-driven motive of private enterprise, which was always prone to rationalization and staff-cuts.

Only a minority (12 per cent) of government workers felt privatization would improve the efficiency of their organizations. As public-sector employees, they defended the sector's continued existence. Although some respondents acknowledged the deficiencies of government departments, they were dismissive of the critiques of inefficiency and the absence of a work culture. Instead, they asserted that the shortcomings were trivial and should not obsessively be focused on. More significantly, they challenged the popular rhetoric of privatization that is often paraded as a punitive threat to discipline the workforce. One informant surmised, 'if this place is privatized, there is no guarantee that it would be more efficient or that people would work more'. In general, the views of public-sector respondents were characterized by a collectivist orientation: privatization was not merely detrimental to the self, but would also cause suffering to others. To most low-ranking government employees, workers were not responsible for inefficiencies; they should be attributed to poor management. They argued that it was innovative management practices that enhanced the efficiency of an organization, rather than privatization. The onus for enhancing the efficiency lay with the managers.

(ii) The role of the management and efficiency

According to most of our informants, poor management was responsible for 'sick industries'. Many attributed inefficiency to bad management rather than to the alleged absence of a work culture among employees, arguing that privatization itself could not solve the problem of the inefficiency of public enterprises.

Responses from some private-and public-sector workers differed according to their individualist and collectivist orientations. Those who professed they were already efficient, reproduced neoliberal ideologies, emphasizing the importance of responsible individuals for the success of their organizations. This was markedly differed from collectivist perspectives, which rested their general critique of liberalization on an anti-privatization stance. While the critiques of militant employees were consistent with their political orientations, the responses of some highly unionized unskilled employees revealed a curious sentiment. On the one hand, their identification of the 'class enemy' embodied in the capitalist class applied only to private enterprise. On the other, they maintained a deferential attitude towards public-sector managers. They considered management in the public sector to be in the possession of superior knowledge and higher education.

The differing assessment of managers in terms of their 'superior knowledge' refers to techniques of management. Modern management techniques comprise the ability to maintain rationality through expert knowledge, and yet remain sympathetic to the needs of employees. This managerial model is compatible with furthering the interest of capital while simultaneously averting conflict between capital and labour. Although the relationship between capital and labour is inherently antagonistic, it occurs within a diversity of labour processes. Capital also needs worker cooperation, creativity and commitment. According to Thompson (1990), this encouragement needs to be more than a material lure or ideological coercion. It appears that in some of the publicly owned enterprises in West Bengal, bureaucrats highly skilled in managerial techniques have been particularly effective in eliciting the consent and cooperation of the employees by obscuring the antagonistic relationship between the management and the workers. This was evidenced by the acquiescence of those subscribing to the ideologies of managerialism, but also that of some militant workers. The latter noted most emphatically that the success of an organization was dependent on the capabilities of talented managers who were able to negotiate good relations with workers in order to bring about the best outcomes. They firmly believed that in all organizations the staff and management were intimately bound up. Further, a good manager was one who had the capability to 'manage change' by introducing innovative practices to enhance efficiency.

The respectful attitude towards managers and bureaucrats is in part due to the bhadralok reverence of education and knowledge.

High-ranking officials in government departments are drawn from the Indian Administrative Service, a highly respected and valued occupation among the Bengali middle classes (if not the whole of India). Therefore, the conclusion that some respondents drew with respect to organized-sector private enterprises was that although there may be better pay in that sector, its managers were whimsical and personality-driven, whereas public-sector officials were stable and rational, and therefore worthy of respect. Alongside their general contempt for private enterprise, they also noted the lack of talent and decision-making power among its managers. Contrasting the rational actions of public-sector managers with the profit motives of private enterprise, they also challenged the popular perception of wastage in government. Some typical responses included:

> Those who are in charge in government have the knowledge and the requisite qualities to run a complex organization. This is lacking in private enterprise. You just can't wake up one morning and decide that you are going to have a lockout or close a college because you are running a loss. In private enterprise you're here today and gone tomorrow.

And

> In private enterprise you might be in this office for a year and then moved to another. So, you try to squeeze the best deal, you take short cuts. In government you have to follow rules and regulations and can't do as you please. In private enterprise a new fellow comes, he prepares a budget, creates a new strategic plan. In two years he is gone and another chap comes along and makes a new plan. So, what happens to the plan that was already in place, the money that was invested and the work that is already underway? You stop what has been done and you start again. What a waste! In government organizations even when the MD has left and a new one comes, he will carry out what is in place.

It goes without saying that since a significant proportion of our respondents were unaware of the management practices in large private corporations, their appraisal of private-sector managers was not necessarily accurate. Contrary to the popular perceptions of our respondents, managers in large private firms are no less qualified and are drawn from similar social backgrounds as the public-sector managers who were held in high esteem by the respondents. State bureaucrats and CEOs of large private corporations are more than likely to have shared their training in the same prestigious educational institutions.

Many respondents were emphatic that government departments should not be judged according to private-sector performances, since key institutions and utilities could not be privatized. Their main concern was that once privatized, these economic assets would be sold off to TNCs at very cheap rates — a move that would not be beneficial to the common people. Their fears appear to be well founded, as demonstrated by the cases of privatization of utilities elsewhere (see Beder 2003).

The Left Front government's efforts to attract investment into the state have manifested in the growth of an IT hub that is expanding at a rate of 70 per cent per annum. The establishment of international call centres and Special Economic Zones (SEZs), major urban redevelopment, and industrialization plans are all well underway. While the militancy of workers, the lack of work culture and the subsequent threats from foreign investment are themes in West Bengal that receive a great deal of attention from the media, Banerjee et al. (2002) show that since the 1980s, man days lost here through strikes are low compared to other states. Datt (2002) shows that more days were lost due to lockouts than strikes, and Pedersen (2001: 659) adds that labour militancy alone is an inadequate explanation for the industrial stagnation and lack of investment in West Bengal, emphasizing instead the absence of infrastructure. However, these arguments are of little help to the people whose anxieties are heightened by the threat of retrenchment.

(iii) Foreign investment and infrastructure

The decreasing faith of development planners in centrally controlled economies and government-led programmes to achieve economic growth and development has led to the renewed emphasis on governments to support industry with infrastructural investment in roads and electricity (Winslow 1995). That is, while neoliberal policy prescriptions emphasize the privatization of economic assets and limit government intervention, they also advocate the much-needed investment in infrastructure to bring about the desired outcomes. Utilizing these principles, Bajpai and Sachs (1999) have evaluated the progress that Indian states have made in reforming their economies to encourage private investment in infrastructure. Although their approach overlooks the political and class dimensions of investment, their neoclassical typology shows a mixed report card for West Bengal. In their view, the state has undertaken the necessary reforms in the industrial sector, while being a poor performer in the power sector and in tax reform. They classify West Bengal as an intermediate performer in terms of growth, lagging behind southern Indian states.

Intense public debate has continued on investment and infrastructure. Our respondents remained unconvinced that TNCs would do anything positive concerning investment which would benefit Indians. They were suspicious about privatization and foreign capital. In other words, in accordance with their nationalist orientation, they not only wanted foreign investment to be favourable to Indians, but were also sceptical that such an outcome would be possible. The majority of the respondents (48 per cent) felt that West Bengal was unlikely to benefit from more foreign investment (only 27 per cent felt that the import of technology would improve productivity). While respondents' views reflect anti-colonial attitudes, especially among the older generation, there has been a considerable shift in the dominant public discourse, which in turn has crept into everyday life.

There have been two remarkable shifts in orientation that reflect the schisms of the Left Front. The first is the necessity of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs); the second is the view that reproduces the rhetoric of efficiency, but this time in relation to the state. The arguments in favour of SAPs being required to redress the crisis of the balance of payments are widely accepted. In terms of the second shift, many respondents argued that though inherently just and rational, the bureaucratic procedures of the state might be cumbersome compared with the speed at which private enterprise operates. Even those opposed to privatization on ideological grounds nevertheless thought that government organizations should also become efficient.

It is also worth noting that many respondents deployed the language of managerialism to enhance efficiency while rejecting privatization. Terms such as 'flexible' and 'embracing strategic changes' were frequently used to describe the qualities that individuals and their co-workers possessed. In general, respondents were apprehensive about the negative social consequences of liberalization, and feared that privatization would result in large-scale retrenchments. However, they advocated that the approach of imposing a strict work discipline in private enterprise should also apply to government employees. A common saying was, 'No, I don't want privatization. But, I want people to work *as if it was* a private organization'. Most people hoped that the state would form appropriate policies to stave off privatization. Their main defence was that they had cultivated the necessary qualities of being strategic and efficient. Ultimately, their sense of self-worth was tied up with the nobility of working for the public sector. Tulika's pejorative remarks noted earlier about the grimy, dismal surroundings of the public-sector workplace inadvertently reinforce what our informants were keen to assert — that working for the public sector is more than just a means to an end.

Discourses of global efficiency and the dynamics of a new workplace culture

How is it that some workers reproduced ideologies of work efficiency, often in the face of, and in conjunction with, the countervailing life-long thinking and practices? We found that notions of efficiency, privatization and deregulation were rapidly gaining a particular currency as the central motifs of the everyday language and practice of the workplace. However, this phenomenon has not manifested itself automatically; it certainly had help from both governments and international inter-governmental bodies, such as the IMF and the World Bank, whose views are persistently propagated in the generally pro-liberalization media. Given these influences, the discourses of efficiency and privatization have developed a life and force of their own, such that they have become significantly responsible for developing new understandings of how individuals should govern themselves.

Harvey (1990, 2005), among others, suggests that the promotion of the work ethic, the nobility of efficiency and productivity, and so on, have been made possible through both persuasive socialization and coercive maintenance. In this view, the state takes a proactive role in social production. The inculcation of the population with particular ideologies of the workplace is seen in terms of a power bloc formed between the owners of capital and the political class. The fundamental principle involved in the dissemination of capitalist logic, such as the deployment of the ideals of 'efficiency' and 'flexibility', is the security and maintenance of the economic system. However, ideologies are not simply imposed; rather, there occurs an articulation of a common value system through the incorporation of ideological elements from other groups (Mouffe 1981: 230). Thus, while the dominant class may incorporate elements from other groups, they do this in a hegemonic way that maintains their dominance, legitimizing certain ideologies favourable to their interests.

Stuart Hall's (1988) analysis of the Thatcherite project of privatization in the UK during the 1980s is also instructive. For Hall, this was one of the most spectacular projects in the form of state activism to promote capitalist relations of production and the construction of an appropriate workforce. According to Hall (ibid.: 166), the discursive articulation of common objectives embodied in this programme was purely aimed at disciplining people for capitalist market solutions, paradoxically with their 'consent' — the strategy of connection with ordinary people. Despite being a highly contradictory approach, it was nevertheless able to construct 'unity out of difference'. 'Common-sense' was remade, wherein the terminology of the market was 'normalized' in combination with the disciplinary themes of order, family values and respectability — a package that formed the everyday conception of what constituted 'national identity'. From the point of view of naturalizing workplace discourses of efficiency, this neoliberal hegemonic project constructed a popular morality. This was the development of what Hall calls a 'practical material–ideological force' that has a language which maps out social reality clearly and unambiguously (ibid.: 143). Highlighting the inherent morality of efficiency and flexibility, the message for workers was suffused with their common issues and problems. The wisdom of the nation was entwined with notions of efficiency in the workplace; to reject this would be amoral. Many of our informants deployed similar moral discourses of hard work in the service of the nation. In addition, however, their moral discourses have resonances with earlier narratives of anti-colonial nationalism.

According to Branislav Gosovic (2000: 447–48), a type of global intellectual hegemony (GIH) has become one of the major characteristics of the neoliberal globalization of the 1990s. In the language of GIH, neoliberal globalization is packaged as new, modern, scientific, result-orientated, and inevitable. The questioning of this paradigm is dismissed as old-fashioned. Public institutions are represented negatively and as being inefficient in contrast to private institutions (ibid.: 450, 453). Gosovic adds that individuals, particularly those who are in the service of governments, may have their own reasons for not speaking out against neoliberalism, including their desire to keep their job and obtain promotions (ibid.: 452). Bourdieu (1998) discussed the insecurities that have become normative under the paradigm of globalization as playing a significant role in the institutionalization, and thus the adoption, of particular market discourses into the language and actions of workers. The growing unemployment and casualization of the workforce has shaped the actions and responses of many workers, breaking down any form of resistance, and more often than not, setting worker against worker. In light of these market articulations, and indeed out of fear, workers strive to become *the most* efficient, flexible and productive worker in an organization. These forces affect everyone, whether employed or not; 'the awareness of it never goes away: it is present at every moment in everyone's mind' (ibid.: 82). People living under globalization constantly feel that they are replaceable; as a result, there is a definite sense that people come to regard work as a privilege, 'a fragile threatened privilege' (ibid.), and most certainly not a right.

The fear of retrenchment was certainly ever-present among some of our respondents. However, what struck us most was the growing prominence of a political rationality that was geared towards delivering an increased call for personal responsibility. Here the strategy of replacing old-fashioned regulatory techniques with techniques of self-regulation may be relevant (Lemke 2001). Moreover, as Beck suggests, the ideal individual worker will take responsibility for her/his part in the creation of an efficient and responsible enterprise. The 'price' of individuality means taking personal responsibility for any failure or misfortune, the benefit being that individuals can now feel a sense of control in that they are 'not passive reflections of circumstances but active shapers of their own lives, within varying degrees of limitation' (Beck 2000b: 167).

Sridharan (2004) offers one of the more insightful overviews and analyses of Indian middle-class (re)composition under liberalizing forces. Reflecting on the trends and their recent voting patterns and political alliances, he observes,

> On the closely related issues of public sector reform and privatization, the public employee component of the middle class could be expected

> to resist downsizing and wage restraints, though it is possible that this could be offset — and made politically less potent — if there is a reassessment of self-interest among those who stand to gain in the increasingly privatized public enterprises, who may realign politically with those people whose family members gain from the growth of the private sector. (Sridharan 2004: 426)

But, for our informants — the *lower* middle classes who work in the public sector in West Bengal — this is not to be. Rather, the majority see neoliberal economic reforms as a challenge to improve their own work practices and the quality of their workplaces, and none indicated to us a lack of support for progressive political parties and progressive ideals. There was some disappointment with the CPI (M) leadership, but also a sense of realism that 'the world has changed'.

These competing perspectives offer some insights into the reasons why our respondents espouse the rhetoric of efficiency. The people in our study do not subscribe to neoliberal ideologies in a uniform and coherent way. Their acquiescence towards self-regulation results from the reconfiguration of earlier discourses of self-sacrifice, hard work and rational planning necessary for nation building. The technocratic solutions that underpin market discourses have a degree of appeal among our respondents due to their familiarity with the modernizing discourses of rational planning characteristic of developmentalism, regardless of political ideologies. Therefore, the Left Front's pragmatic embrace of market solutions, which are now being reconfigured as 'rational' progress towards better developmental outcomes, appears to our respondents as being part of a continuum, and not a radical departure. More significantly, as Hann (2002) has demonstrated in his ethnographic accounts of transitional economies, it is important to recognize the meaning that socialist ideologies have for the aspirations of ordinary people, the significance of their emancipatory rhetoric and their practical benefits. Suffice it to say that for many people in West Bengal, the CPI (M) has been a symbol of some remarkable transformations, and a catalyst for others (Lieten 1996). These conflicting approaches to planned development were reflected in the narratives of our informants. It is particularly worth noting that they were by and large motivated by a broader sense of collective good, one which values public 'service', public institutions and democratic participation.

Conclusion

In this essay we have examined the ways in which people give meaning to notions of efficiency and how they struggle with the contradictions that emerge as they navigate the terrain between government rhetoric and the reality of their own lives. A number of people in this study have internalized the state's rhetoric of global efficiency precisely through the continuum of earlier state discourses of modernization and scientific rationality. A major reason for talented managers being able to solve their problems is their firm belief in the modernizing discourses of techniques and rationality. For some, the transition from scientific socialism to scientific managerialism has been made possible by the very process of modern education and political socialization.

Significantly, this research found an essential and ongoing tension between the state and labour in West Bengal, especially in the urban areas. The incomplete struggle is one whereby the Left Front government has to ideologically convince the urban middle classes of the benefits of privatization and of the state's renewed vigour towards liberalization. However, neoliberal reforms presuppose an individualistic, entrepreneurial spirit which, in comparison to other states, has not been strong in West Bengal. Moreover, Bengalis see the benefits of collective action and unionization, a view strongly and commonly held despite one's political allegiances. In the final analysis, the Left Front government's attempts to implement changes in the workplace are viewed with suspicion as a means to undermine workers' rights and to take away the protection of the state, a protection fought for and won over several decades.

We further found that for our respondents liberalization has offered few realized opportunities. Rather, they clearly articulated who they perceived the beneficiaries to be. For many, the disdain for the new rich is remarkable, and often they were ridiculed, seen as lucky, considered the 'undeserving rich', or even 'uncultured'. Van Wessel (1998) found similar sentiments in her work among the middle classes in Baroda, as did O'Dougherty in her study of the Brazilian middle classes (2002: 47). For our informants, the relative decline of their economic worth is compensated for by their increasing cultural struggle to maintain their bhadralok superiority. This is exemplified in the recent struggle over the compulsory teaching of English at the primary level in West Bengal, whereby the middle classes mobilized en masse to overturn the government's decision to abolish English teaching. Their problem is compounded by both the media's and the governments' (national and state) exaggerated claims about a booming and prosperous middle class, and so they struggle to maintain their status in an era where conspicuous consumption is valued and promoted. There is thus an ongoing cultural–political struggle over valued cultural institutions (such as education and the media) and urban spaces.

Finally, most of our respondents further emphasized that their lives had no resemblance whatsoever to those of the wealthy members of the middle classes, by noting the crumbling surroundings of their streetscape, apartment block and/or portions of the joint family residence, and, most important of all, by pointing to their ability to provide the extras associated with successful educational outcomes for their children. Several parents were proud of their working children's concerted efforts to contribute to the family pool of resources, rather than going on spending sprees. Again, they noted this to be a decisive difference between their children and those of the new rich. Essentially, they try to inculcate the values of national duty, civic responsibility and respect for family, values taught to them and reinforced during their schooling and while growing up in the 1950s and 1960s. Thus, our informants generally articulated their difference from the upper echelons of the middle class by adopting a moral argument about the cultural appropriateness of the 'right' or correct middle-class behaviour and practices.

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Middle-class politics, citizenship and the public sphere

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The Obscenity of Censorship: Rethinking a Middle-class Technology

William Mazzarella

Cultural emergency?

In the latter half of the 1990s, censorship became an obsessive topic in the Indian media. For about five years, it seemed that one could not turn around without coming across yet another story about a magazine editor being harassed or even beaten by right-wing goons, about cinemas showing the films of Deepa Mehta or Mira Nair being trashed, about Bollywood starlets or saucy models being summoned to court for obscenity or indecency, about offending books, paintings and articles being slashed and burned amid saffron flags and TV cameras. Hindi film director Mahesh Bhatt, always ready with a sound bite, went so far as to call it a 'cultural emergency'.[1] The implication was that various forces were now imposing, in the cultural domain, the kind of political repression for which Indira Gandhi became infamous in the mid-1970s. Censorship was in the courts and in the streets. The very idea of censorship as an exclusive prerogative of the state was being called into question, as all manner of activists and enthusiasts, with more or less tenuous connections to official powers, appeared ready to capitalize on the spectacular possibilities of the 24-hour news cycle that cable television had recently brought to India.

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[1] Mahesh Bhatt, 'Is the Police Asking me to Ignore the Heart-breaking Fact that Many Officers Looked Away while Blood Flowed on the Streets of Bombay?', *Rediff on the Net*, 29 December 1998, http://www.rediff.com/entertai/1998/dec/29zakhm.htm (accessed 21 January 2007). Derek Bose notes that Bhatt provoked protests with his statements in support of pornography at a time when he was on the governing council of the government-owned Film and Television Institute of India in Pune: 'In a memorandum to the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, prominent women's organizations in the country demanded Bhatt's removal on the grounds that no Indian citizen and particularly one holding a government office can affirm the right to watch pornography' (D. Bose 2005: 150).

At the time, I was watching out of the corner of my eye — most of my attention was focused on the advertising business, about which I was writing a book. To be sure, advertising had enjoyed its share of controversies during this period — Tuff Shoes and KamaSutra condoms to name but two — but there was something about the formulaic, even ritualistic, quality of so many of the censorship controversies of that time that turned me off. In a strange way, all this frenzied visibility seemed to make the cultural politics of censorship less rather than more intelligible. Each episode seemed both staged and subsequently interpreted according to a well-worn script: the drama of cultural globalization, the overdetermined clash between cosmopolitans and traditionalists, between liberals and reactionaries, iconically fungible and ready-made for nightly summary on CNN. A hardened and generic 'economy of stances' (Hansen 1999) seemed already to have been established. The traditionalists complained that Fashion TV and beauty pageants were an affront to Indian modesty and mores. The liberal cosmopolitans lamented the provincialism and prudery of the cultural conservatives.

It all came to a head around the question of 'obscenity' in July 2002. That month, legendary film director Vijay Anand resigned as chairperson of the film censor board, officially known as the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC), after his plan to reform film censorship lost the backing of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, which had appointed him only the previous year. The most overtly controversial of Vijay Anand's proposals was to establish a string of dedicated movie theatres in Indian cities where X-rated films could be shown.[2] In the wake of his resignation, the English-language media turned him into the kind of tragic hero it has always loved best: an enlightened, worldly liberal sacrificed on the altar of political cowardice and cultural reaction. *India Today*'s cover story had the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting 'recoil[ing] in Victorian horror' at Anand's proposals.[3] The story was clear: the government's cultural politics were regressive, committed to outdated values. Its censorship practices were holding India back from the kind of world-class cosmopolitan future that she deserved.

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[2] The suggestion had apparently originally emerged from a relatively high-powered group of civil servants, writers and journalists in Thiruvananthapuram (Trivandrum), Kerala (D. Bose 2005: 29).

[3] Kaveree Bamzai and Sandeep Unnithan, 'Is Sex OK?', *India Today*, 5 August 2002, p. 57.

As if to confirm the diagnosis, the government played its part by appointing, as Anand's interim successor, a former Member of Parliament and Gujarati actor by the name of Arvind Trivedi. Here was a man the secular liberals could comfortably love to hate. For starters he was most famous for playing the mythological demon-king Ravana in the smash-hit late-1980s televisation of the *Ramayana*, and thus embodied the kind of mass-mediated, affect-intensive mobilization of Hindu mythology that had assisted the cultural right wing's rise to national power. As if that were not enough, there were the quotes. Trivedi lost little time in presenting himself as the traditionalist corrective to Vijay Anand's cosmopolitanism. Regarding the X-rated theatres, he told the press:

> I am completely against such a suggestion. It goes against our *Bharatiya* [Indian] tradition. What do we want to prove by having such theatres? That we are modern? What kind of culture are we trying to promote? Following Western countries shouldn't be our aim. What about people who will have to live in the vicinity of such theatres? Is this the kind of landmark we're looking for? *Samaj mein kalank lag jayega* [it will be a blot on our society].

Trivedi proceeded to evoke an unstoppable prurient escalation, a spreading stain of infamy: 'There will be no end to it. First kissing, then pressing, then whole bedroom. What effect will it have on the kids?' As a concluding rhetorical flourish, he equated Indian films with the very apex of spiritual and physical purity, with the source of the river Ganga itself: 'Films are the *Gangotri* of our society. They are something holy. We shouldn't soil them'.[4]

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[4] Ibid. My intention here is not simply to participate in the easy scoffing that so often greets outbursts like Trivedi's on the part of those people against whom such accusations are directed. Instead, I think it would be important to historically situate this desire to protect the 'essence of Indianness' from the more brutal winds of global modernity. One strand of such a historicization leads back to the British colonial policy of non-interference in Indian 'customs', whereby 'traditional' Indian practices, particularly those that the British understood as authentically 'religious',

How does one move beyond this predictable political ping-pong? Unlike some critical commentators, I do not think that the answer lies in dismissing the uproar around obscenity as substantially trivial, little more than a convenient smokescreen for 'real' political issues. For instance, when Vijay Anand resigned, some remarked that the media's obsession with the obscenity aspect of the case was in fact all too convenient for the government, since it helped to divert attention away from both more sensitive instances of political censorship and some of Anand's truly radical reform proposals, especially the one to curtail the government's power to appoint the members of the censor board as well as a large proportion of the membership of its regional Advisory Panels (Bhowmik 2002; D. Bose 2005).[5]

These are real and important issues, and I discuss them at length elsewhere. But I would also like to grant the censors the compliment that they least expect — of being taken seriously. To be sure, they hardly make it easy. The very language of film censorship in India so often seems wilfully archaic, preserving, as it does, the legal terminology of another epoch: baroque stuff about moral turpitude, depravity and corrupted social fabrics. A language that, in its very utterance, seems excessive and theatrical. And yet, at the same time, this is a language the underlying assumptions of which are maintained and articulated with straightforward sincerity — assumptions concerning the dangerous volatility of certain kinds of images and the excitability of certain classes of people.

I often found this same duality in the talk of my middle-class informants. They would wax sarcastic about the preposterous, overblown terminology in which government censorship was couched,

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were granted relative protection from administrative intervention. Another strand leads back to the proto-nationalist distinction so influentially described by Partha Chatterjee (1993), according to which an 'inner' cultural sphere of Indianness was set apart from an 'outer' sphere of *Realpolitik*. Both strategies, of course, inadvertently helped to produce what they were in the business of protecting: namely, 'authentic Indian culture'.

[5] The Advisory Panels comprise the individuals, at each of the CBFC's regional centres in India, who may be drawn upon to constitute the Examining Committees which, in the first instance, evaluate a film for certification.

with the attitude of: how could one take such paternalistic nonsense seriously in the world's largest democracy? And yet, in the same breath, they would affirm its underlying postulates: 'yes, but those kinds of people really *are* very excitable. Have you *seen* how they act when they see a movie poster with a half-naked woman on it? Have you *heard* the noises they make in the front benches at the cinema?'

It is conventional to read this duality as a symptom of the political hypocrisy of the Indian middle classes: they invoke liberal ideals that they cannot bring themselves to apply to their subaltern compatriots.[6] From this standpoint, all the complicit talk about obscenity, moral corruption and the excitability of the masses can be dismissed as blatantly ideological — a fig-leaf for bourgeois domination. But by dismissing it like this, I think we risk losing sight of what is most important and, in a certain sense, 'real' about the discourse of obscenity. And since it takes the cinema as one of its prime locations, we might as well begin there.

The cinema, that most obscene medium

Obscenity law in India predated the arrival of the cinema by a good 40 years. And, of course, there has been no shortage of obscenity cases involving other media since then. But I would still argue that cinema is the quintessentially obscene medium. Why?

Cinema is the one medium that in India is generally thought to reach everybody. The power of this claim rests less on whether people everywhere really do go to cinema than on the fact that cinema spectatorship is a way of belonging to a mass public without being literate. Cinematic citizenship is affective and sensuous before it is discursive. As visual anthropologist David MacDougall puts it, cinema images remind us of the moment where 'thought is still undifferentiated and bound up with matter and feeling in a complex relation that it often later loses in abstraction' (MacDougall 2006: 1). From a regulatory standpoint, this undifferentiated space is ambiguous because it is just as likely to ground the national imaginary in sensuous pleasure as to destabilize it.

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[6] Cf. William Mazzarella. 2005. 'Middle Class'. SOAS Centre of South Asian Studies' Keywords in South Asian Studies, http://www.soas.ac.uk/southasianstudies/keywords/> (accessed 1 February 2011).

Cinema not only seems to reach everybody, then, but it also brings people into a proximity that is anonymously intimate. Scholars like Brian Larkin (2010), Poonam Arora (1995) and Priya Jaikumar (2006) have shown how troubling and how transgressively exciting the cinema was in colonial times: a vast, darkened hall in which Europeans breathed the same air and became absorbed in the same images as their brown subjects. Through the years, official Indian inquiries have routinely attributed an uncanny 'potency of life'[7] to the cinema. Justice G. D. Khosla's et al.'s *Report of the Enquiry Committee on Film Censorship* of 1969 is as good an example as any to quote at length:

> A communication medium which involves the visual and aural senses in a single coordinated process must make an immediate and vivid impact upon the recipient. A modern sound film, specially the version in vivid realistic colours, is unique among all art forms and media for its evocative potential. The viewer is apt to forget the real world around him, because it is completely hidden from him by the impenetrable curtain of darkness which surrounds him and envelopes [*sic*] him. The device of photographing faces and expressions from extremely close quarters accentuates the realism of what happens on the screen, and not only facilitates but compels a sense of identification with the characters in the film. A book is usually read in an environment which discourages make-belief [*sic*]. The presence of real [*sic*], the actual world, cannot be shut out or forgotten. Also the reading is spread over many days, or many hours, and the very passage of time, specially if there are frequent interruptions, is a reminder of the unreal and the fictional in the book. A film, on the other hand, lasts for two or three hours, and runs without interruption. The continuous concentration on the subjects, the feeling of isolation in the darkened cinema hall and the vividness of the moving and speaking pictures conjure up an atmosphere of reality about the whole experience. (Khosla et al. 1969: 60)

The censors tend, of course, to see the cinema's absorbing potency as dangerous, just as film theorists since the very beginning of the medium have often seen it as liberatory.[8] These are not the only options. Propagandists and publicists have since the early days of the moving image sought to harness its provocative energy to instrumental aims, whether political or commercial. Anxieties over the cinema's potential obscenity have followed close behind. In the 1920s, many Europeans and some Indians worried that Hollywood spice would corrode the legitimacy of colonial power and corrupt the cultural integrity of the colonized. And it should come as no surprise that obscenity was back on the agenda in the 1990s, when India was undergoing an advertising-led consumerist revolution. This was a time when Indians were being invited to equate citizenship with consumerist enjoyment rather than with developmentalist duty. Or better, the new duty *was* to enjoy oneself (Mazzarella 2003). Within such a dispensation, any undue restriction on the erotics of consumption could only appear as fundamentally undemocratic. So it was that Vir Sanghvi of the *Hindustan Times* felt moved in 1999 to pose this rhetorical question: 'How does it make sense to argue that an illiterate person can decide who will be the next Prime Minister of India but has no right to gaze deeply at [beauty queen] Sushmita Sen's navel?'[9]

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[7] These were actually the words of the legendary US censor code maker, Will Hays, whose written testimony was included in the proceedings of the Indian Cinematograph Committee of 1927–28 (see Mazzarella 2009).

Once were sexy

In order to begin to understand how the voting/navel conundrum could arise as a complaint, we need to spend a little time considering one of the hoariest claims in the Indian public cultural repertoire, namely, the claim that Islamic and European invaders not only dominated Indians politically, but caused a once-sensuous civilization to become prudish and repressed.

When I first started researching Indian film censorship in 2003, informants kept telling me that if I wanted to make sense of why the censors were so arbitrary and so perverse, I would need to understand that they were operating within a legal framework that was, in all its essentials, imposed by Victorian Brits. The entire ontology of Indian censorship was, therefore, both alien and anachronistic. At a deeper level, the story went, the experience of colonialism had separated Indians from their own cultural heritage and left most of them, even today, as awkward as elementary schoolchildren when it came to public representations of sex. Such a view was reinforced outside India as well, for instance, in the work of performance theorist and Indophile Richard Schechner who remarks:

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[8] Interestingly, the discourse of censorship attributes many of the same properties to the cinema — above all, its absorbing and disorienting intensity — as did both the avant-garde film theorists of the early 20th century (Jean Epstein, Vachel Lindsay, Béla Balász, Walter Benjamin, Siegfried Kracauer, Sergei Eisenstein, Dziga Vertov, etc.) and today's more phenomenologically inclined cinema scholars (Vivian Sobchack, Laura Marks, David MacDougall, Linda Williams, Tom Gunning, and others).

[9] Vir Sanghvi, 'Hear us, Madame Censor', *Telegraph*, 15 August 1999.

> until the Mughal conquest and then the English, there was no anti-theatrical prejudice or Puritanism in India. Far from it — the arts, infused with intense sexual pleasure, were often part of the religious experience. India today is less open to the *rasic* mix of art, sensuosity, and feasting than before the advent of the Mughals and the British. (Schechner 2003: 343–44)[10]

Was it not a world-historical injustice that a civilization that had engendered such unabashed refinement in the realm of the senses should have to subject itself to laws authored by a group of repressed British public-school boys?[11] In journalist Derek Bose's words:

> [A]s the land of the Kamasutra and Khajuraho temples, India should be the last place on earth where people have to be so paranoid about pornography. Even today, a majority of Indians worship the *Shivalinga*, well knowing that it is nothing but the male and female genitalia locked in holy union. Similarly, youngsters are told how Lord Shiva demonstrated the 108 postures of lovemaking to his consort Parvati and that Lord Krishna spent his youth frolicking with scores of *gopis* [milkmaids]. The nation's latest export is not bicycles or software professionals but *tantra*.

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[10] This was the unabashed Indian past of which liberals liked to remind the cultural conservatives when, for example, the latter's action squads decided to destroy the work of M. F. Husain for daring to paint Saraswati 'in the nude'.

[11] Justice Khosla must have been inspired by his work on the film censorship inquiry committee in the late 1960s, because in 1976 he published a book on the fate of the 'erotic' in Indian civilization, the effects of colonization, and the lessons to be derived from all this for censorship (Khosla 1976).

> Yet an innocent kiss or hug between a consenting couple today can get the moral police to call foul. This schizoid attitude extends to members of the Censor Board who just refuse to understand that such natural displays of affection on screen are not western imports but remain deeply ingrained in the Indian psyche and have been celebrated time and again in the scriptures, art and culture. In fact, it is the West which is now learning from India on how to be more imaginative about sexual expressions. (D. Bose 2005: 199)

The notion that there was no anti-theatrical prejudice in pre-Islamic India will hardly withstand the available evidence.[12] Nevertheless, the idea of cultural–sexual repression at the hands of invading foreigners does important work in the present, by opening up the possibility that this ancient sensuous Indian self may be recuperated in the future. And in the 1990s, this recuperation was supposed to come about through the generalized erotics of consumerist liberalization — if only the censors and the self-styled cultural police would get out of the way.

The informal ban on kissing in Indian films (which was breached with some regularity only in the 1990s) is often invoked as evidence of how sexual repression will inevitably produce cultural and creative perversion. In the wake of his resignation from the censor board, Vijay Anand demanded of a journalist: 'Why do you think we have so much vulgarity, songs, dances, pelvic thrusts, bathtub fantasies and dream sequences?', and proceeded to answer his own question: 'Because you don't allow a simple kiss'.[13] Some 30 years earlier, Justice Khosla's report had been forthright on the connection, observing that

> an embargo has been placed on kissing, but vulgar and distasteful antics of an animal and highly lascivious kind are permitted . . . We have drawn attention to the importance of regarding the entire question of taste, vulgarity, eroticism and creative experimentation with an adult

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[12] As Farley Richmond (1993[1990]), for example, points out, ancient sources reveal that while the performance of Sanskrit drama was understood as a sacred ritual, the social status of actors was in practice highly ambiguous. Brahmins, for instance, would not accept food from their hands.

[13] Quoted in Sandeep Unnithan, 'Interview with Vijay Anand', *India Today*, 5 August 2002.

> and balanced mind, free from a stultifying obsession with fake morality. Pornography, eroticism and sex are part of human life. Once this basic fact is accepted, a reasonable attitude towards the whole subject of artistic freedom and obscenity is possible. Undue suppression of sex themes by law has the same effect on the minds of the people as unwholesome confinement of filth and dirt in their bodies. (Khosla et al. 1969: 122, 137)

In fact, of course, kisses only became unacceptable in Indian films around the time of Indian Independence (Prasad 1998). Kobita Sarkar puts the matter tartly: 'Along with foreign rule, we banished the kiss from our films as if there were some deep-seated mystical connection between the two' (K. Sarkar 1982: 55). But whatever the historical origins of the prohibition, the Hindi film's approach to sex is taken to be repressed rather than simply regulated. The conclusive proof of this is that Indian film-makers have lamentably failed to turn censorship into an occasion for creative sublimation. As one account noted around the time of Vijay Anand's resignation:

> In Iran, the straitjacket of the censors has only stimulated creativity, as filmmakers make their points through elliptical metaphors. In China, they situate contemporary issues in earlier centuries. In Latin America, they employ magical realism to tackle political angst. In India, they simply shoot reams of extra footage of sex and violence, which the censors can chop, leaving the rest of the film more or less intact.[14]

Vijay Anand's plan for X-rated theatres was, ostensibly, based on the notion that legalizing erotica would cut down on the illicit trade in porn and, since it would have been taxed at a much higher rate than the mainstream cinema, provide the government with a handy windfall as well. Ultimately, however, he assumed that the 'outing' of sex would lead to its demystification.[15] If the British had in part been to blame for Indian prurience, then it was also in Britain, as a young man in the 1960s, that Vijay Anand came to realize what lay beyond it. He told me of having excitedly entered a pornographic cinema in London and being astonished to find it nearly empty. 'Why aren't people inside? They're fed up with it. You can only see so much and no more than that. Sex is very boring if you go on showing it that way'.

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[14] Meenakshi Shedde and Kaajal Wallia, 'Censor Board Misses the Wood for the Trees', *Times of India*, 2 August 2002.

[15] This may have been on Vijay Anand's successor Anupam Kher's mind when he told the press in August 2004, apropos Anand's proposals, that 'I don't agree with it. I don't think the Government should participate in the sexual fantasies of the people. It has far greater things to think about' (quoted in Indu Mirani, 'The Problem was the Film-makers' Defiance', *Tehelka*, 14 August 2004).

The pissing man and the ideological loop of censorship

The implication, then, was that there is a connection between the profusion of perverse vulgarity in Hindi films and the Victorian framework of the legal apparatus that constrains cultural production in postcolonial India. Several different rules, guidelines and enactments, with both regional and national jurisdiction, are invoked in the censoring process and in court cases. But perhaps the most fundamental piece of legislation is the one that deals with obscenity, Section 292 of the Indian Penal Code.

Section 292, as we know it today, was enacted in 1925, after India had become a signatory to the 1923 Geneva Convention on traffic in obscene materials. It has been modified from time to time since then, including a major reshuffle in 1969, when something approaching a definition of obscenity was inserted.[16] This definition built on and extended an earlier formula, the so-called Hicklin Test, which continues in practice to be the yardstick applied in Indian courts to questions of obscenity. In 1868, a Protestant by the name of Henry Scott was prosecuted over an anti-Catholic tract he had published under the title *The Confessional Unmasked: Shewing the Depravity of the Romanish Priesthood, the Iniquity of the*

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[16] '[A] book, pamphlet, paper, writing, drawing, painting, representation, figure or any other object, shall be deemed to be obscene if it is lascivious or appeals to the prurient interest or if its effect, or (where it comprises two or more distinct items) the effect of any one of its items, is if taken as a whole, such as to tend to deprave and corrupt persons who are likely, having regard to all relevant circumstances, to read, see or hear the matter contained or embodied in it' (Law Publishers [India] 2003: 143).

Confessional and the Questions Put to Females in Confession (1867).[17] Having intended to expose the obscenity of priestly practice, the accusation rebounded onto Scott himself.[18] Lord Chief Justice Francis Cockburn determined: 'I think the test of obscenity is this: whether the tendency of the matter charged as obscenity is to deprave and corrupt those whose minds are open to such immoral influences, and into whose hands a publication of this sort may fall'.[19]

Who are these people 'whose minds are open to such immoral influences'? In colonial times, Indians, whose bodies spoke a 'very graphic language', were thought to have a peculiar natural affinity for the gestural, sensuous address of the cinema, especially in its silent form.[20] The uneducated, with their savagely mimetic skills, were thought to be especially quick at picking up the 'cinema sense' (Indian Cinematograph Committee 1928b: 112; cf Mazzarella 2009). After Independence, this deplorably submissive tendency to yield and absorb moved from being an index of racial inferiority to one of shameful underdevelopment. If the British had plundered India's resources and retarded her cultural development, successive Indian governments had done all too little to bring the masses forward. To be sure, Indians now had the vote, even if they were not always allowed to gaze deeply at Sushmita Sen's navel. But were they mature enough to use it? Vijay Anand for one thought not. When I met him, more than a year after he had quit the CBFC, he was still seething. For the government to have left him high and dry was one thing, but the larger failure of post-Independence India to educate its people was nothing short of scandalous:

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[17] Scott was prosecuted under the then relatively recent Obscene Publications Act of 1857. Deana Heath usefully reminds us that the Bill, when first mooted, looked unlikely to pass the upper house. But then the great Indian uprising of 1857–58 (a.k.a. the Sepoy Mutiny) broke out, and lent the legislation wings back home in England. Heath quotes M. J. D. Roberts: 'It strengthened the resolve of Evangelical interventionists to purify the home society to make it worthy of its imperial mission. It also immensely hardened the general public mood against "sentimentality" in matters of social control, including the sexual' (Heath 2010: 39).

[18] This 'boomerang effect' is characteristic of obscenity cases. Insofar as a word or an image is thought to be obscene, its contextualization within a sociologically or artistically redeeming context does not necessarily fully cancel its virulent potential. In 1968, Samaresh Bose, a writer of Bengali fiction was accused by a young advocate, Amal Mitra, of having included obscene details in his novel *Prajapati*, then being serialized in the journal *Sarodiya Desh*. Bose was eventually (in 1985!) acquitted in the Supreme Court, but the judge who found him guilty in the Calcutta High Court had written: 'To my mind it is also in the fitness of things that thinkers and litterateurs have a function to deal with the problem by use of the strength of their pen for giving expression to their thoughts and suggestions. Yet literature as an art is one of certain technique and conscious caution. When the subject is virulent, that provides all the more reasons for subdued caution, lest in the attempt to locate the virus and disclosure of [*sic*] its causes, the treatment itself spreads the poison to contaminate many more who are yet uncontaminated' (quoted in S. C. Sarkar 2006: 872).

[19] Regina vs Hicklin, 3 Queens Bench 360, 362 (1868). The Hicklin Test got its name from Benjamin Hicklin, the Wolverhampton magistrate who ordered Henry Scott's pamphlet to be seized. It remained operative in the United States until the 1930s, and in the United Kingdom until the 1950s.

> It is true. That's why some of our very silly mythologies are superhits. But then that is bad! How dare we keep our people illiterate after fifty-one, fifty-two years of freedom? . . . I have an educated vote, but somehow our politicians have kept this country illiterate, saying 'this is not good for the illiterate'. How long are we going to do that? . . . Politics has got so much significance here, more than in any other country in the world. And yet we are not a politically mature country . . . I don't think the voter is intelligent enough to vote. (17 November 2003)

Note the slippage that takes place here. We move from a generalized lament about the collective cultural repression bequeathed to India by its colonizers into a quite different discourse. Suddenly, the public Indian subject is split: Vijay Anand himself has 'an educated vote', but as regards 'this country' in general, 'the voter is [not] intelligent enough to vote'.

The crucial dividing line was, apparently, literacy. After the Arvind Trivedi interregnum at the censor board, the chairpersonship was taken over by the well-known character actor Anupam Kher. In most respects, Kher's breezy cultural populism contrasted sharply with Anand's troubled liberalism. But when it came to an illiterate person's vulnerability to provocative images, they were of more or less the same mind. Kher explained it to me in graphic terms:

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[20] This observation was offered apropos the habitus of 'coolies' by one E. Villiers of the European Association of Calcutta to the Indian Cinematograph Committee (Indian Cinematograph Committee 1928a vol. 2: 957).

> An illiterate mind is much more prone to getting affected by it than a literate mind. If you are an illiterate man, and I tell you that this is where you have to piss, [then] because you are not literate you will go and piss there . . . But a literate man will say 'no, no — I know where the toilet is'. That's the kind of illiteracy that India has, unfortunately. (12 November 2003)

Kher was implicitly equating illiteracy with an absence of autonomous judgement; this ignorant man would piss where he was told because his lack of letters left him with no way to achieve a critical, autonomous distance to the immediately given situation and the immediately given command. This was also, as we shall see, how the censors imagined an illiterate person relating to an image: as a kind of literal, irresistible command.

Vijay Anand complained that such ignorant literalism had got India stuck in a narrowly identitarian politics: 'The considerations for voting', he told me, 'are not political judgment, but some other: "He belongs to my caste, he belongs to my religion"'. And for Anupam Kher, it produced an infantile inability to sublimate one's relation to the reproductive facts of life. Perhaps censorship would no longer be necessary in India, he reflected, once 'sex education will be there in the schools, when people will not giggle at the name of a penis or a vagina'.

It is at this point that the ideological loop of censorship begins to emerge. The logic goes like this: first one acknowledges that a censorious repressive morality and a lack of education have kept the masses immature. Then one proceeds to insist that, for this very reason, further censorship is necessary in order to protect these illiterate unfortunates from their own worst instincts. A classic example of this circular reasoning appears in the *Report of the Working Group on National Film Policy* of 1980. The report defines Indians as vulnerable and thus in need of censorship:

> Particularly in the context of a hyper-conservative society like India, which has rigid social and religious norms of behaviour, where the political consciousness has still not matured and where harsh economic

> conditions inhibit individual growth, there are bound to be serious limitations on the freedom of expression. (Quoted in Bose 2006: 3)

From there it is only a short step to insisting that Indian cultural policy must therefore not, as it were, get ahead of itself: 'Censorship can become liberal only to the extent society itself becomes genuinely liberal' (ibid.).

How should we understand the connection that is so hastily drawn between political immaturity and sexual repression here? Complaints about the common person's political immaturity are often read as expressions of a disillusionment with the reality of mass democracy in India on the part of the educated, and an associated longing for the kind of 'benevolent dictatorship' that would finally put things in order. But when it comes to sexual repression, its class location is far less clear. The common people are on one level imagined as the prurient, repressed audiences for smutty lowbrow films. At the same time, as my informants often noted, the educated classes are the primary inheritors of the repressive disciplines of a colonial civilizing process, whereas the poor, having grown up in single rooms housing multiple generations, could not help but be fully acquainted with the facts of life.

In other words, the conventional alignment between political immaturity and sexual repression papered over a more ambivalent set of anxieties concerning the relation between class and citizenship. And the unleashing of consumerist liberalization in India during the 1990s brought all these tensions to the surface. On the one hand, liberalization put upper middle-class desires front and centre in Indian public culture once again, after a couple of decades during which they had been increasingly displaced from the arena of formal politics by subaltern mobilizations. On the other hand, the voluptuous idiom of consumerism, as conveyed in advertising, television programming and films, was a sensuous language of the body. Therefore, it was, potentially, a language in which even the illiterate could be recognized as fluent speakers.

The 'adult discount': A sensory prophylaxis

Consumerist liberalization was always going to overflow its own boundaries as a tightly managed marketing project. My point is not simply that consumerism was cruelly deceptive, because it teased those without means with images of products beyond their reach. Nor am I only saying that consumerism is inherently based on the maddening infinity of desire. On a much more fundamental level, and in conjunction with the emotive, figural project of Hindu nationalism during these same years (Rajagopal 2001), consumerist liberalization promised a model of citizenship grounded in sensuous resonance rather than in the discursive dreariness of deliberative democracy. The question, then, necessarily became one of how to avert the radically democratic possibilities of such a promise. On this front, the liberals and the cultural conservatives, ostensibly antagonists within the Indian culture wars, were in perfect agreement.

Elsewhere I have described how advertising campaigns carefully sought to manage the relation between universalizing erotics and aspirational distinction in the 1990s (Mazzarella 2003). The work of censorship was also caught up in this tension. On the one hand, the censor board was supposed to represent the interests of the public at large, to protect them from themselves, which is to say, to protect them from the corruption that would ensue when an obscene image activated that internally abject pissing man of Anupam Kher's example. On the other hand, an important line of thinking within censorship reform imagined the censors as doing something rather more subtle than simply 'blocking' or 'silencing'. It saw censorship as a kind of positive force of aesthetic pedagogy, not only preventing the circulation of undesirable images, but also encouraging the production and consumption of more refined representations. This positive function would come about partly as a result of the prohibition of unacceptable images, to be sure, since then film-makers would no longer be able to capitalize on the baser pleasures of bump and grind. But it was also imagined as a training of the spectator's sensorium, a kind of aesthetic 'uplift' to go with the usual socio-economic elevation.

Critics of censorship often remark, wryly, that if the job of the censors really is to keep their fellow citizens safe from the sensory toxins of obscenity and sedition, then perhaps the censors themselves should, after a few years of self-sacrificing public service on the board, qualify for some kind of government disability pension, considering the presumably debilitating dosages of these toxins they must have absorbed in the course of their work. The witticism expresses the perceived hypocrisy of censorship: a protective service performed on behalf of the general public by members of that public who are themselves somehow miraculously immune to contamination. Here, again, I think that the joke deserves to be taken seriously.

In November 2003, I had an encounter that was at once frustrating and telling. I had made an appointment to meet V. K. Singla, the then Mumbai Regional Officer of the CBFC, at its headquarters in the well-heeled and centrally located neighbourhood of Walkeshwar. Singla, an appointee of the then-ruling BJP government, was seen by many as the very incarnation of politically motivated meddling. Of course, I had expected Singla to be guarded, but I nevertheless arrived at the meeting hoping that he might help me look at some files that Vijay Anand had assembled during his tenure as Chair. Nothing doing. I had made the elementary mistake of informing Singla of my desire ahead of our meeting, so when I reiterated my request in his office, he was able to perform perfect magnanimity while ensuring absolute obstruction. An underling, who had clearly been briefed in advance, was sent, ostensibly to look for the files. Inevitably, within a few minutes he returned to inform us that no such files existed. With an apologetic gesture and an offer of coffee/tea, Singla substituted the CBFC's standard-issue little red booklet for the longed-for archival bounty.

So far, so frustrating. But then I asked V. K. Singla why, if the censor board was, by its own definition, supposed to represent a 'cross-section of society and interests' (CBFC 2009), it could not also include *paanwallah*s (roadside betel-leaf sellers) or taxi drivers. Genuinely horrified, he exclaimed: 'but he might go out and *do* what he saw in the film!' Here, Singla was invoking the subaltern subject whose mind lacks what the Khosla Committee defined as an 'adult discount' (Khosla et al. 1969: 119), in other words, a mature sensory prophylaxis against the mimetic commandment of images.[21] For such an unprotected person, reasonable judgement might not intervene to create a reflective lag between viewing and doing.

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[21] This notion of an audience segment unable to withstand the dangerous contagion of obscenity is a stock figure of censorship debates. Deana Heath (2010) reminds us that in the 19th century, the policing of obscenity in Britain sought to protect vulnerable publics at home from the salacious contagion of the 'Orient', and even the 'Continent' across the English Channel.

I was struck more by the emphatic, sincere manner in which Singla spoke at this moment than by the content of what he said; after all, everything I had heard about his reign at the Mumbai Regional Office had prepared me for such sentiments. What surprised me more was that Vijay Anand, that seeming beacon of liberalism, turned out, in this regard, to be thinking along similar lines. When I suggested to Anand, some weeks later, that the censor board represented the general public, his reply was immediate: 'It doesn't. It represents the government . . . You can't have, for example, a milk-seller'.

Here it might be useful to take another look at the Hicklin Test. Justice Cockburn stipulated, you will recall, that the test of obscenity was whether 'the tendency of the matter charged as obscenity is to deprave and corrupt those whose minds are open to such immoral influences, and into whose hands a publication of this sort may fall'. In the guise of the politically immature citizen — the pissing man and the paanwallah for whom viewing and doing are automatically linked — we have seen some of the ways in which 'those whose minds are open to such immoral influences' are imagined. But who are their more judicious counterparts? Rather than asking the usual question, i.e., 'how is it possible to think anyone would be so vulnerable to an image?', let us reflect for once on the opposite and implicitly corollary question: 'how is it possible to think anyone would *not* be so vulnerable to an image?' Who is the continent counterpart to the pissing man? Presumably, it is the censor, the person with the requisite 'adult discount'. But what kind of being is the censor?

Pelvic thrusts — why not?

The censor board and its Advisory Panels are supposed to consist of 'a cross-section of society and interests'. But what does that mean in practice? In the 1920s, during the first decade of formal film censorship in India, the regional censor boards would offset official British representation with a selection of more or less leisured 'native gentlemen', picked to represent the most locally important religious communities. So, in Bombay, for instance, there was a

Hindu member, a Muslim member and a Parsi member.[22] By the 1930s, this identitarian cultural logic was coming under pressure. Various social reform and moral hygiene organizations sought membership, as did community- and religion-based groups. And the film industry itself, which by the mid-1930s was organizing itself into a range of professional associations, argued that censorship should be guided, if not entirely undertaken, by people who were experts in the field.

But what, actually, *is* the 'field' to which film censorship pertains, and who counts as an expert? One could certainly make the argument that if films appeal to basic human emotions and experiences, this would be a field in which expertise would be entirely independent of formal education. Walter Benjamin, for one, famously argued that with the advent of the cinema, everyone was in a position to be at once an absorbed enthusiast and a critical expert.[23] But in practice, expertise in this area has generally been taken to mean either cosmopolitan cultivation or industry experience, more narrowly defined. Justice Khosla's report in the late 1960s argued that

> [t]he Censors must possess suitable educational qualifications and cultural background. They should be persons commanding public respect; they should have a broad outlook on life. They should know something about the arts and the cultural values of this country, they should have travelled widely and should be persons who can be expected to deal with the problem of censorship without the handicaps of unreasonable inhibitions or an obsession with petrified moral values or with the glamour of so-called advanced groups. (Khosla et al. 1969: 100)

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[22] Presumably, the British officials who made up the balance of the board's membership were imagined as the custodians of Indian Christian interests. For a more extensive discussion of the composition and operation of the colonial film censor boards, see Mazzarella (forthcoming).

[23] 'The progressive attitude [made possible by the cinema] is characterized by an immediate, intimate fusion of pleasure — pleasure in seeing and experiencing — with an attitude of expert appraisal' (Benjamin 2002 [1936]: 116).

Khosla's ideal censor, then, was a person whose cosmopolitan calm prevented their getting stuck in either of the twin hysterical ruts of provincialism: defensive cultural conservatism or compensatory over-reaching liberalism. Khosla's censor is a person with the perspective that follows from taking a 'broader view', a person able to step back to a coolly judicious distance from the hot allure of an image in its more 'corpothetic' aspect (Pinney 2001, 2004).[24] The ideal censors are, according to this view, by no means numb to the image. Rather, their aesthetic judgement is, in a classically Kantian way, disinterested; their life experience has shown them how to transcend their own immediate concerns for gratification and identify with a higher *sensus communis* (Kant 1999 [1986]: 194) — the impersonal, sensuous unity that truly offers a foundation for a rational community. By this measure, the impassioned viewer in the front benches of the cinema hall, shouting, squirming and whistling, is hopelessly and blindly lost to the sensuously *interested* gratifications of the image.[25]

Vijay Anand, otherwise strongly influenced by the Khosla report, wanted to make the censor's job description still more specialized. Paradoxically recapitulating precisely the identitarian logic that he deplored in political life (Muslim candidates for Muslim voters, etc.), he insisted, in the course of our conversation, that a film censor had to be equipped with special cinematic expertise. The memory of his own battles with the film censor board in the 1960s still rankled:

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[24] Pinney coins the term 'corpothetics' to describe a sensuous engagement with images and material culture that is popular, affective and, above all, opposed to the Kantian prescription of disinterest: 'If "aesthetics" is about the separation between the image and the beholder, and a "disinterested" evaluation of images, "corpothetics" entails a desire to fuse the image and the beholder, and the elevation of efficacy (as, for example, in *barkat*) as the central criterion of value' (Pinney 2004: 194).

[25] The Puritan ideology that defined Max Weber's 'Protestant Ethic' was, of course, deeply committed to the principle that sensuous gratification would always have to be deferred in order to achieve progress in the future. (It is not hard to see how such self-denial, such subordination to the Law, would quickly become its own form of perverse enjoyment, as Slavoj Zizek has often pointed out [e.g., Zizek 1993].) As such, the ideology is closely related to the deferral of immediate gratification that has been so central to the developmentalist ideology of the post-Independence Indian state. This commandment was only partly undermined by the consumerist rallying cry of 'let's enjoy ourselves!' from the mid-1980s onward (Mazzarella 2003). Indeed, one might say that many public cultural issues in India today have to do with the sometimes contested, sometimes complicit relationship between self-denial and self-reward in the service of the nation.

> It's too ridiculous! You have to remember, the man sitting in the chair of the censor chief, he didn't know the language. He didn't know cinema. He didn't know films at all. He didn't know what he was talking about! He had a *moral* code in his mind and he wanted to say 'no — this is vulgar, you cut it out. This is not done. This is not Indian culture'. *Ut*-ter nonsense! . . . I say if you have a dance festival, and you have judges, you can't have a musician sitting there. He must be a man of dance. He cannot give an award to the best dancer. He doesn't know what dancing is all about. If it's a music festival you can't have dancers. And if it's a film thing you can't have people who don't understand what cinema is.

As one might expect, Anand's wish was viewed by those of a more populist persuasion as an expression of rampant elitism. When I met Anupam Kher, for instance, I tried out a version of a Vijay Anand-style argument on him, according to which the repression of the so-called frank representations of sex in the cinema had led to a proliferation of infantile vulgarity. Kher snapped back:

> To me, these are all very intellectual terms . . . I don't agree with all this. To me, it's *bookish*. It's a very, very . . . it's a conversation of high society. To me it is [adopts a mockingly pedantic tone] 'repression of the art of depression of society'. . . to me, I call it — pardon my language — but I want to say 'fuck off'. *Real people* do not talk like that.

Kant's refusal of 'interested' pleasure, on the other hand, is connected to his insistence that the true aesthetic judgement must be utterly non-teleological. That is to say, it cannot be conditioned by any utilitarian purpose or instrumental aim. The forfeiting of a 'lower' pleasure in the here and now paves the way for a 'higher' pleasure in the future. Some, again, would argue that this supposedly higher pleasure is simply a disingenuous name for the perverted enjoyment of the masochist. But in his *Anthropology*, Kant exhorts: 'Young man! Deny yourself satisfaction (of amusement, of debauchery, of love, etc.), not with the Stoical intention of complete abstinence, but with the refined Epicurean intention of having in view an ever-growing pleasure' (Kant 1978 [1798]: 39).

While for Kher an illiterate man might not know better than to piss where he was told, there was certainly no reason why he should be subjected to the condescending cultural pedagogy of over-intellectualizing elites. Kher argued that the content of a so-called vulgar film might well be

> obscene for a person who basically has the money to sit and listen to [Hindustani classical sarod player] Ustad Amjad Ali Khan in an auditorium in Delhi. But a man who is working in a paan shop does not find anything vulgar. He gets entertained by it. Most of our Indian dances have pelvic thrusts. So that's perfectly OK. Courtesans used to do *kathak* [north Indian classical dance]. Prostitutes used to perform . . . Pelvic thrusts? Fantastic, I think. Why not? And . . . why shouldn't the sexual fantasy of a man sitting in the audience from the lower-middle class be satisfied while watching a movie? Nothing wrong with that . . . That's his dream woman. That's keeping him away from crime.

Leaving aside the political utilitarianism that at the last moment modulates this defence of the common man's pleasures ('That's keeping him away from crime'), there are a number of objections that one might raise against this kind of argument. It surrenders any criterion of aesthetic judgement altogether. It is essentially complicit with the logic of the market. But perhaps the most important limitation is of a different order: whether one laments or applauds the cultural preferences of the paanwallah, there is no way he is going to be allowed to become a censor.

The discourse of censorship splits the subject down the middle. On one side, we have the pissing man, helplessly saturated by the commandment of the image. On the other side, we have the censor with his judicious distance, his adult discount. And each of these torn halves of the subject immediately suggests its own obscene transformation. The first of these we have already encountered: the horrifying prospect of the subaltern *as* censor. But the counterpart to this is the equally horrifying prospect of the legitimate censor's illegitimate *jouissance* in the darkness of the screening room. Not for nothing did the Hicklin Test arise out of a case involving the scandalous figure of a lecherous priest getting all hot under the collar in the confessional booth.

Why does talk about censorship split the subject like this? Do these two figures of the subject work like the gap that Adorno once identified between popular and high culture under capitalism, 'torn halves of an integral freedom, to which, however, they do not add up'? (Adorno 1995: 123). A useful step towards answering this question of the torn obscene subject may be to spend some time considering how Indian law regards the obscene object — because here we will encounter an analogous split.

'The administration of justice to aesthetics'

Scholars, jurists and journalists routinely complain that obscenity is an exceedingly vague concept. S. C. Sarkar's exhaustive commentary on the Indian Penal Code remarks that '[n]o arithmetical definition of the word "obscene" covering all possible cases can be given' (S. C. Sarkar 2006: 893). Indira Jaising, a senior advocate in the Indian Supreme Court, notes that the concept of obscenity, as enshrined in the Hicklin Test, is 'essentially a moral one and incapable of precise definition . . . For no one has yet been able to define what it is that has a "tendency to deprave and corrupt"' (Jaising 2006[1986]: 116, 117). Indian legal opinions too have consistently cautioned against any definition that is too specific, so as not to pre-empt the active and situational judgement of the court in particular instances.[26]

US Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart's 1964 remark regarding hardcore pornography is well-known: 'I can't define it, but I know it when I see it'.[27] It would appear that Indian Supreme Court Justice Muhammad Hidayatullah had something similar in mind when he said in, as it happens, the same year: 'The word "obscenity" is really not vague because it is a word which is well understood, even if persons differ in their attitude to what is obscene and what is not' (quoted in Gour 2005: 894). What kind of understanding or knowing is being invoked here?[28] What kind of property of an object is 'obscenity' if the concept cannot actually be defined?

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[26] Former Supreme Court Judge V. R. Krishna Iyer put it in his inimitably colourful style in his judgement on Raj Kapoor vs Delhi (State) Admn., 1980 (a.k.a. the *Satyam Shivam Sundaram* case): 'A besetting sin of our legal system is the tyranny of technicality in the name of finical legality, hospitably entertained sometimes in the halls of justice. Absent orientation, justicing becomes "computering" and ceases to be social engineering' (quoted in S. C. Sarkar 2006: 854).

[27] Jacobellis vs Ohio, 378 US 184 (1964). This appeal to a situated 'way of knowing' has been central to US judgements on censorship and obscenity for a long time. Today, in the wake of Roth vs United States (1957) 'contemporary community standards' are invoked, but even as early as the decisive 1915 Mutual vs Ohio case, which denied freedom of speech to cinema, 'The justices felt that the law could be fairly enforced because "its terms . . . get precision from the sense and experience of men and become certain and useful guides in reasoning and conduct"' (quoted in Jowett 1999: 27).

Censorship has always struggled with definitions and lists. Censors do, of course, like to draw up long and often quite curious lists of unacceptable words, images, situations and so forth; in short, inventories of 'bad things which must be banned'. And yet, at the same time, censors are always struggling with a sneaking sense that these lists are somehow inadequate. The lists are not inadequate because something potentially objectionable is always going to be left out or overlooked. Rather, it is as if the element that is potentially objectionable in language, representation or action can simply not be inventoried in advance in this way. I first became aware of this during my research on the colonial Indian government's attempts in the late 1920s to find a reliable way to regulate cinema. Again and again, often to the great frustration of officials, respondents to the Indian Cinematograph Committee inquiry would point towards what I call 'content beyond content', an uneasy but also exciting sense of a mobile, corporeal potentiality in the moving picture that could not be captured in a list of empirical contents (Mazzarella 2009).

This uneasy sense of a mobile potentiality has led to two dominant legal understandings of obscenity as a property/characteristic of objects. The first, which is often taken to be the more old-fashioned and moralistic view, suggests that certain things are inherently obscene and must therefore simply be kept out of circulation. This kind of an argument has historically often been made about, say, graphic depictions of sexual intercourse or extreme violence. In India, it informed, for example, the 1932 judgement against a book called *Ramesdar Atmakatha*, which purported to be the life narrative of one Ramesda, complete with detailed descriptions of his sexual adventures. The publisher, Kailash Chandra, was charged and convicted under, inter alia, Section 292 of the Indian Penal Code. Justice Jack called the book 'manifestly obscene' and Justice Mitter added that '[t]he object which the writer has in view is really immaterial. If the publication is an obscene publication it would be no defence to say that the law was broken for some wholesome and salutary purpose' (Jack and Mitter 1932).

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[28] Elizabeth Povinelli suggests that 'we know it when we see it' in practice means 'we feel it when we feel it' ('Recognition, Camouflage, Espionage: Maneuvers of Power in Late Liberalism,' talk delivered at the University of Chicago, 24 April 2008).

The second understanding of obscenity is often seen as more modern and more liberal. Here, the key proposition is that obscenity cannot be taken as an inherent or 'manifest' property of a thing, but, rather, must be adjudicated in relation to the context in which it occurs. A graphic depiction of sex, say, *might* be obscene, but it might also be justifiable in the interests of science (when it is part of a medical manual) or possess redeeming social value as part of the aesthetic structure of a work of art.[29] In former Supreme Court Judge V. R. Krishna Iyer's vivid prose: 'Should the writing be viewed as a whole so that its thrust may be better evaluated or should the court merely pick out isolated passages where obscenity oozes?' (Krishna Iyer 2006 [1988]: 40).[30]

One of the most striking aspects of Section 292 of the Indian Penal Code is the way it layers, in a palimpsestic manner, both postcolonial and colonial understandings of how obscenity can be avoided. On the one hand, the Section contains wide-ranging liberal caveats about the higher good of science, art, learning, and society.

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[29] So, for instance, possibly obscene language may be justified in a work of fiction if, in the name of realism, the socio-cultural context of the characters demands that they speak that way (see, for instance, Samaresh Bose v Amal Mitra). Alternatively, a sociological study of prostitutes might, in the interests of scientific–documentary accuracy, require that the crude language of their professional context be realistically conveyed (Promila Kapur vs Yash Pal Bhasin).

[30] In India, the question of the on-screen kiss has been an important fulcrum of this debate. Precisely the de facto, rather than de jure, status of the ban has identified the on-screen kiss as a manifestly obscene thing. For this reason, the ban has also been a favourite target of liberal reformers. Justice Khosla's report, for example, argued that '[t]here is no justification for banning a kiss between members of the opposite sexes or even the nude human form, if such a scene or shot is strictly relevant to the story and is displayed in good taste, in a sensitive artistic manner, without unduly emphasizing the erotic aspect' (Khosla et al. 1969: 93).

The 1969 revision of the Section stipulates that an exemption from charges of obscenity may be granted to a thing '(*i*) the publication of which is proved to be justified as being for the public good on the ground that such book, pamphlet, paper, writing, drawing, painting, representation or figure is in the interest of science, literature, art or learning or objects of general concern'. On the other hand, the Section effectively also preserves the old British colonial policy of non-interference in native custom, which excuses from any charge of obscenity any thing '(*ii*) which is kept or used *bona fide* for religious purposes' (Law Publishers [India] 2003: 143).[31]

In other words, at the 'modern' end of the law, obscenity is cancelled by the kind of mature reflexiveness that years of specialized cultivation and training can bring. And at the 'traditional' end, obscenity is cancelled by another kind of distance: the aura of the sacred.[32] The scientist and the serious art lover are protected by their education. Common people are protected by their faith. So if both the educated and the uneducated are safe, then why should the censors worry? Because, as I quickly came to realize, the censors see social reality as out of step with the ideal types enshrined in the law. In other words, they see the vast majority of Indians as lost in a no man's land between traditions that have lost their innocence and an incomplete, arrested modernity. Artists are too easily seduced away from the path of beauty by the lure of the market and its hunger for sensation. And the massive uprooted migrant populations swelling India's cities have torn themselves away from the comforting bosom of tradition without receiving a compensatory grounding in modern education. The gap is being filled with provocative consumerist dreams and identitarian populist politics. This vision of a live public culture populated by unmoored and incomplete subjects, subjects always dangerously *becoming* rather than safely *being*, is the space of obscenity.

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[31] The safeguarding of tradition in Section 292 takes both secular and religious forms. The 1969 addition specifies that the charge of obscenity will not apply to 'any representation sculptured, engraved, painted or otherwise represented on or in (i) any ancient monument within the meaning of the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958 (24 of 1958), or (ii) any temple, or on any car used for the conveyance of idols, or kept or used for any religious purpose' (quoted in S. C. Sarkar 2006: 849).

[32] 'Works of a religious character are also exempt, but their exemption is based on the principle that they arouse feelings of veneration and reverence in the believer and cannot, therefore, be designated obscene. They are mostly allegorical or mythical figures long associated with religious sentiments and they cannot, therefore, have the debasing influence which it is the object of the section [Section 292] to repress' (Gour 2005: 903).

As a consequence, the law wants to have it both ways: obscenity is at once a manifest property, on the order of absolute, irreducible fact *and* relative to context. Consider the following perfectly confused piece of commentary in one published authority on the Indian Penal Code:

> As regards obscene songs, everything depends upon the songs themselves. A love song is not necessarily obscene unless it suggests coarse and indecent associations. A *lavni* [a popular form of song and dance in western India] is not necessarily an obscene song. It may be, and often is, obscene. But, on the other hand, far from being obscene, it is also considered almost sacred by the Maratha people. So a *gazal* [*sic*] signifies nothing. It may be sacred or profane. If the latter, it may be a mere love song or it may savour of obscenity. The question is a question of fact and it is for the prosecution to prove what the song was and what it signified. (Quoted in Gour 2005: 910)[33]

When it comes to obscenity law in the UK and the US, the standard story about the 20th century is a narrative of progressive liberalization, in which jurisprudence moves from manifest to contextual understandings of obscenity. But in India, despite frequent attempts to establish a similarly linear narrative, things have always and quite obviously been more complicated. There has been a great deal of judicial hand-wringing, particularly at the level of the Supreme Court, over when and how the law might intervene in the sphere of art, because, as Krishna Iyer put it, 'State made strait-jacket is an inhibitive prescription for a free country unless enlightened society actively participates in the administration of justice to aesthetics' (quoted in S. C. Sarkar 2006: 856). Justice Krishna Iyer in particular pushed beyond the conventional liberal anxiety about 'law's manacles on aesthetics' (ibid.: 855) to resist the Puritan fanaticism of 'prudes and prigs and State moralists' (ibid.: 856): 'Social scientists and spiritual scientists will broadly agree that man lives not alone by mystic squints, ascetic chants and austere abnegation but by luscious love of Beauty, sensuous joy of companionship and moderate non-denial of normal demands of the flesh' (ibid.: 858). Such a healthy life of the senses was all the more appropriate in India given its 'lustrous heritage', comprising 'the world's greatest paintings, sculptures, songs and dances . . . the Konaraks and Khajurahos, lofty epics, luscious in patches' (ibid.: 856). And yet the supposedly disjunctive conditions of Indian modernity also often seem to preclude such mature measure.

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[33] One might perhaps interpret the furore that arose around the '*Choli ke peechhe kya hai*?' song sequence in Subhash Ghai's film *Khalnayak* (1993) in this light. This song, built around the kind of provocative double entendre that might, for example, be found and celebrated in a lavni number, became subject to the charge of obscenity when it addressed itself to the anonymous mass public of the cinema hall.

The differing fates of D. H. Lawrence's novel *Lady Chatterley's Lover* in the UK and India provide a good example. In 1960, British courts absolved the book of obscenity charges in a test case of the new Obscene Publications Act, passed the previous year. The judgement was also hailed by many Indian jurists as a model to be followed in their own country. Nevertheless, in 1964, Supreme Court Justice Hidayatullah, an exceptionally articulate and erudite man and by no means a cultural reactionary, ruled against *Lady Chatterley's Lover* by weighing a contextual understanding of obscenity against the persistent latent menace of the inescapably and inherently obscene thing. As Justice Hidayatullah put it in his judgement:

> [a]n overall view of the obscene matter in the setting of the whole work would of course be necessary but the obscene matter must be considered by itself and separately to find out whether it is so gross and its obscenity is so decided that it is likely to deprave and corrupt those whose minds are open to influences of this sort.[34]

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[34] Ranjit D Udeshi vs State of Maharashtra, INSC 177 (19 August 1964). Justice Hidayatullah's key consideration in this case was to protect the emergent vernacular literatures of India from the temptation of relying on cheap sensationalism, rather than literary integrity, to achieve visibility: 'Emulation by our writers of an obscene book under the aegis of this Court's determination is likely to pervert our entire literature because obscenity pays and true art finds little popular support' (quoted in S. C. Sarkar 2006: 876).

If a 'serious' novel in English, with its limited circulation and educated audience, could cause such apprehensions, then what mischief might commercial cinema not do? Justice Krishna Iyer ultimately defended Raj Kapoor's film *Satyam Shivam Sundaram* against accusations of obscenity in 1980, but not before exclaiming:

> It is deplorable that a power for good like the cinema, by a subtle process, and these days, by a ribald display, vulgarizes the public palate, pruriently infiltrates adolescent minds, commercially panders to the lascivious appetite of rendy [*sic*] crowds and inflames the lecherous craze of the people who succumb to the seduction of sex and resort, in actual life, to 'horror' crimes of venereal violence. (Quoted in S. C. Sarkar 2006: 858)

A conventional conclusion at this point would be to fall back again on that familiar diagnosis of an arrested, even schizophrenic, postcolonial middle-class cultural politics, split between a commitment to liberal progress and a phobic relation to the subalterns. Instead, let me introduce a final interpretive twist by posing two more questions. First, is there something left to discover in the seemingly preposterous notion of the 'inherently' obscene object, something that may open up a far more general consideration of the dynamics of public culture? Second, might we then be in a position to move beyond not just the tiresome old liberals vs reactionaries opposition, but also to rethink the way middle-class discourse conventionally constructs its relation to subaltern publics?

Haptic tendencies

Let us return, one last time, to the Hicklin Test. Justice Cockburn remarked that something was obscene if 'the *tendency* of the matter charged as obscenity is to deprave and corrupt those whose minds are open to such immoral influences, and into whose hands a publication of this sort may fall'. In my earlier references to the Test, I have emphasized the latter half of the definition, the part that makes obscenity a function of the social circulation and, implicitly, of the cognitive equipment, education and aesthetic proclivities of those 'into whose hands a publication of this sort may fall'. But let us now take a look at the first half, and especially at this crucial word 'tendency' — a tendency that the Hicklin Test presents as a property of the object.

To speak of tendency here means, at first reading, to recognize obscenity as something *virtual*, that is, as a potentiality that might or might not be actualized.[35] As Pierre Lévy puts it, 'the virtual is that which has potential rather actual existence. The virtual *tends* toward actualization, without undergoing any form of effective or formal concretization' (Lévy 1998: 23; emphasis in the original). What would it mean, then, to say that obscenity is a tendency of an object? I have already noted that censorship always struggles with lists, that censorship always seems to be pointing to something in an image or in an object that cannot be positively itemized as part of its empirical content. If censorship, then, is particularly sensitive to a kind of 'content beyond content', then, perhaps, this is where we find the tendency of the object — its virtual potential rather than its actual forms. Maybe, it is this tendency that we are registering when we say 'I can't define it, but I know it when I see it'.

But what does it mean to 'see' something that is virtual rather than actual, a tendency rather than a given feature? What mode of perception registers this tendency? The Khosla Committee report suggests that pure entertainment in the cinema is a recipe for slack citizens 'because it tends to make the mind flabby, it arrests the thinking process, it dulls the creative impulse and makes people both physically and mentally lazy'(Khosla et al. 1969: 69). The question, as ever, is not simply one of the content of the images, but also of the peculiar sensory 'impact of the cinema [which] is much more vivid and much more powerful than of any other medium' (ibid.).

Now, as we have seen, Khosla opposes this flabby, passively permeable mind with its 'arrested thinking process' to the 'adult discount' of the cultivated aesthetic judgement, that is to say, the faculty that will protect a spectator from being abjectly overwhelmed by the provocation of the screen image, and hence defenceless against obscenity. If we are trying to understand obscenity as the tendency of an object, then is it not our 'adult discount' that is imagined here as protecting us from this tendency? And, conversely, is it not an 'arrested thinking process' that opens us up to this obscene tendency? Ostensibly, the 'arrested thinking process' of the entertained spectator is imagined here as a purely abject state — this is the person who still giggles at the mention of a penis or a vagina, who is cognitively 'stuck', unable to move beyond literalism in sex, as in politics. But if one side of such arrested thinking is its stupid inertia, then does not this getting 'stuck' also threaten to activate unforeseen tendencies in an image?

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[35] Justice Hidayatullah, in his *Chatterley* opinion, remarked that the Hicklin Test's preoccupation with 'tendency' 'lays emphasis on the potentiality of the impugned object to deprave and corrupt by immoral influences' (quoted in S. C. Sarkar 2006: 876).

Euro-American readers above a certain age will be familiar with the traumatic experience of Super 8 home movies getting jammed in the projector, an obscene flower of melting celluloid spreading with alarming speed across the image as the heat of the lamp burns through the arrested film. It seems to me that the censorial discourse on obscenity that I have been exploring here imagines something similar taking place in the mind of the spectator when his thinking process is arrested. The viewer equipped with a suitable 'adult discount' traverses the image at a steady and respectable speed of 24 frames per second. But the same image threatens to bubble up obscenely in the minds of those who may get stuck or unduly fixated on it. On the one hand, the obscene tendency of an image appears here as the failure of all meaning, a complete celluloid meltdown. On the other hand, it suggests an uncontrolled and frightening profusion of corporeal associations and affective intensities.

The obvious question to ask at this point is whether this obscene tendency is a property of all images, or only of certain kinds of images, say, for instance, literally sexual or otherwise problematically 'graphic' images. In the first instance, I would say that this is an empirical question: the obscene tendency is a property of all images which, for whatever reasons, are *compelling* in a particular socio-historical context, that is to say, images that absorb and trigger strong affective resonances. But in order to flesh out this proposition, there are some more particular considerations that first need to be taken into account.

Indian feminists have long noted that calling certain kinds of images obscene or indecent effectively serves as an alibi for other images that may be just as offensive.[36] Flavia Agnes, for example, writes that 'the equation of indecency with nudity and sex allowed all other portrayals of women to pass off as "decent". When women clad in saris were depicted in servile, stereotypical roles, these images were not attacked as indecent' (quoted in B. Bose 2006: xxxiii). In this case, focusing attention on a certain kind of content diverts attention away from other kinds of content that may be just as problematic. Could one make a similar argument about not only the content but also the *tendency* of images? That is, is there something about how images can 'work on us' in uncanny and perhaps subversive ways that is not the exclusive property of those images that conventionally get labelled obscene?

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[36] The question of the difference between obscenity and indecency as legal and public categories is itself very interesting. For reasons of space, I will not delve into it here, except to say that 'indecency' has been put forward as a more conveniently prosecutable criterion than 'obscenity'. This was part of the impetus for the drafting of the Indecent Representation of Women (Prevention) Act of 1986 which, as many have pointed out, nevertheless used the two terms interchangeably in its wording.

Film and media theorist Laura Marks (2002) speaks of the erotics of 'haptic images' — images to which our relation of looking is touch-like, images in relation to which we lose objectifying distance and thus in some sense 'lose ourselves'.[37] The point here is that the haptic image is not necessarily erotic because it is sexual. Marks writes: 'Haptic images are erotic regardless of their content, because they construct a particular kind of intersubjective relationship between beholder and images' (ibid.: 13). The haptic

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That same year, the Samaresh Bose vs Amal Mitra (the *Prajapati*) case introduced a distinction between obscenity and vulgarity. The central point here was that vulgarity, while certainly lamentable, had none of the corrosive, corrupting force — and therefore none of the danger — of obscenity: 'A vulgar writing is not necessarily obscene. Vulgarity arouses a feeling of disgust and revulsion and also boredom but does not have the effect of depraving, debasing and corrupting the morals of any reader of the novel, whereas obscenity has the tendency to deprave and corrupt those whose minds are open to such immoral influences' (quoted in S. C. Sarkar 2006: 854).

[37] The distinction between 'haptic' and 'optical' viewing seems first to have been drawn by art historian Alois Riegl. Claude Gandelman writes: 'Riegl stated that one type of artistic procedure, which corresponds to a certain way of looking, is based on the scanning of objects according to their outlines. This trajectory of the regard Riegl called the optical. The opposite type of vision, which focuses on surfaces and emphasizes the value of the superficies of objects, Riegl called the haptic (from the Greek *haptein*, "to seize, grasp," or *haptikos*, "capable of touching") . . . The optical eye merely brushes the surface of things. The haptic, or tactile, eye penetrates in depth, finding its pleasure in texture and grain' (Gandelman 1991: 5).

image might be sexual, but it might equally well be a shot of a freshly cut lawn. Content is less important than the mode of apprehension.[38] A haptic relation to an image requires, one might say, the 'arrested thinking process' that, in the censor's discourse, defines the vulnerable spectator. At first pass, a haptic relation to an image is experienced as a kind of interruption or crisis, a failure of anticipated meaning.[39]

I would like to extend the point here by proposing that this haptic quality is definitive not only of the kind of art images that Marks is discussing but also of all those publicly circulating images, speech acts and gestures that in one way or another provoke us and arrest our attention. Perhaps the main difference between haptic experiences in art and those made available to us in mainstream publicity is that in the former, the haptic provocation is foregrounded, made explicit. In publicity, on the contrary, the haptic dimension is, as it were, disguised: it operates, but under the cover of conventional meaning. We often speak as if publicity 'regiments' images by forcing them to illustrate pre-decided and predictable meanings. I think this is a mistake. To be sure, at one level, publicity is all about the standardization and administration of public meaning. But I would add that it only *works* (that is to say, it only arrests our attention) when its meanings are not quite 'closed', when a tension persists in the communication between the overt, regimented meaning *and* something at once more concrete and more undecidable, that 'content beyond content' that is the space of haptic perception. The paradox of publicity, then, is that it depends on a haptic provocation that will always exceed and potentially trouble the ostensible meaning of the message.

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[38] As I discuss elsewhere (Mazzarella forthcoming), the term 'apprehension' is particularly apt in relation to censorship, conveying as it does associations of experience, understanding and arrest.

[39] My argument here is parallel in some respects to that of Bill Brown in his essay 'Thing Theory', where he notes that 'We begin to confront the thingness of objects when they stop working for us: when the drill breaks, when the car stalls, when the windows get filthy, when their flow within the circuits of production and distribution, consumption and exhibition, has been *arrested*, however momentarily. The story of objects asserting themselves as things, then, is the story of a changed relation to the human subject and thus the story of how the thing really names less an object than a particular subject–object relation' (Brown 2001: 4).

During the years I have spent mulling over the meaning of the project of liberalization that unfolded in India during the 1980s and 1990s, I have come to the conclusion that this was perhaps its most important, yet generally overlooked, aspect. The whole injunction to buy consumer commodities and to imagine oneself as defined by the semiotic worlds of those brands was, as it were, the manifest, surface level of liberalization. But at a deeper level, liberalization involved the generalized unleashing of a mode of public communication — an intentionally *haptic* mode of public communication — whose implications and effects could by no means be contained by the images and narratives of consumer advertising. Haptic communication is, of course, not in itself new. At one level, it is as old as the science of rhetoric, and in its modern forms it has been with us ever since what we call advertising and propaganda have been around. What liberalization did was to generalize haptic tactics as a universal model of public communication. It tried to make a practical social science out of activating the 'tendency' of images. It should go without saying by now that that also meant activating the 'tendencies' of the publics that were thus being brought into being.

The project of liberalization, as it unfolded during these years, was always caught in a complex game of affect-management; a game of incitement and containment in which the haptic potential of publicity, once triggered, had to be channelled into specific containers of commitment, or, as I have put it elsewhere (Mazzarella and Kaur 2009), into meaning-that-matters. In effect, liberalization involved the broadcasting of an ambiguous message. On the one hand, liberalization was all about liberation, a liberation of long-repressed libidinal and affective energies (for that reason the rhetoric of liberalization also had to paint the past as materially, politically and sexually repressive). On the other hand, this liberation had to follow approved pathways, to be channelled into consumer brand worlds and identitarian, often chauvinistic, political affirmations. All this may be admitted and yet the conventional critique of public communication in the age of liberalization tends to overlook the ways in which its provocations and possibilities necessarily exceed its approved agendas, whether commercial or political.

Am I not now leaving obscenity behind? Yes and no. My argument here, in conclusion, is two-fold. First, to repeat, that it is in the legal discourse on obscenity, a discourse concerning an apparently fringe phenomenon, that we find an important clue to how *mainstream* publicity works. My second point is that the association of these powerful, perhaps dangerous, haptic tendencies with obscenity alone works as an alibi for mainstream publicity. How does this happen?

When a provocative object appears before us, we experience its shocking force as being inherent in the object, as something external to us that exerts a disturbing, perhaps fascinating, destabilizing 'pull' on us and our quotidian rhythms. Perhaps it would be closer to the truth to argue that the object is able to exert this 'pull' on us because it condenses, in an external object, a fracture, a set of largely disavowed potentials that already structure the ways in which we inhabit our worlds. From this perspective, true obscenity is the extent to which, in everyday life, we have already 'spoken for' our haptic inclinations, already domesticated them in the service of some normative discourse.

So when it comes to the so-called moral police, the obsessive and apparently preposterous repetition of phrases about obscenity as a threat to the moral fabric of the nation should in fact be taken quite seriously. The moral fabric, i.e., the symbolic order of cultural convention, *is* in fact at risk of unravelling, not because of some extreme set of obscene images that can be quarantined by law as unacceptable, but because of the latent obscene potential of *mainstream* images, the ever-present 'tendency' for the haptic energy of publicity to slip out of alignment with its manifest meaning, and thus to complicate the symbolic orders that images are normally expected merely to 'illustrate'.

In the face of this dizzyingly universal threat, the law responds by installing a more manageable and limited prohibition — the prohibition on objects considered 'obscene' in the conventional sense: i.e., images that are supposed to be 'repulsive, filthy, loathsome, indecent, and lewd' (S. C. Sarkar 2006: 894). This more predictable prohibition serves a double function. First, it creates the appearance of a specific terrain of the obscene that can be controlled. Second, one might say that it invites a more limited transgression. If transgressive desire remains fixated on those images and objects that are officially deemed to be 'obscene', then it is less likely to activate the obscene potentialities of mainstream communication.

Slavoj Zizek (1993) captures this dynamic of displacement effectively. Unable to confront the 'void' at the heart of all signification (the terrain that I would identify with its disavowed haptic potential), the symbolic order installs compensatory prohibitions — bad objects that, of course, subsequently invite their own transgression. And yet at each moment of the symbolic transgression, there is the sense that one has not quite reached the obscene thing that was supposed to lie beyond the prohibition. Instead, one gets folded all the more tightly back into the 'obscene superego loop', that is, an attachment to laws that is inextricable from the pleasure of transgressing them.[40]

From this standpoint, one could also reconsider J. M. Coetzee's ironic remark that whereas 'inexplicable' means 'unable to be explained', 'undesirable' certainly doesn't mean 'unable to be desired'. He suggests that from the censor's point of view, 'What is undesirable is the desire of the desiring subject: the desire of the subject is undesired' (Coetzee 1996: viii). But is that it? Is it not rather the case, following the logic of the obscene superego loop, that the 'undesirable' is precisely that which the censor *would* prefer the subject to desire? The obscene image, as defined by the censor, would thus be the site of a prohibition that keeps the desiring subject locked into a loop of subjection and transgression, a loop that maintains an official symbolic authority by serving up tacitly approved transgressions like 'obscenity'.

Seeds of the future

Perhaps I might hazard a simile here by recalling how, in Freud's essays on sexuality (2000 [1905]), the polymorphously erogenous body of the child is organized through sexual maturation, and thus reduced to the *telos* of genital sexuality. The politics of publicity might be understood that way too: the polymorphously haptic potentials of the public field are organized into a tacit ideological compact between approved objects of desire (aspirational brands and political subject-positions) and standardized sites of 'obscene' transgression. But those disavowed polymorphous potentials nevertheless remain and are implicitly evoked every time we are incited to buy or imperiously advised to avert our eyes.

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[40] See also Taussig (1999) for an admirably provocative discussion of the mutual dependence of censorship and the 'defacing' energy of transgression.

In terms of the Indian 'culture wars' of the 1990s, with which I started this discussion, we are now in a position to discuss the work of censorship in a way that resolutely moves beyond the claustrophobic back-and-forth of liberals vs reactionaries. Indian liberals have tended to seize the horizon of the future as their own, whether that future be the future of a developed Indian modernity or of a world-class Indian consumer space. While acknowledging the necessity of censorship for the so-called masses, liberal opinion has been outraged when that censorship has threatened to cut into the freedom of consumer choice. This is where the censors have routinely been branded as both repressive and regressive, trying to force India back into an imaginary version of the past or, at the very least, preventing it from joining the global comity of cosmopolitan taste.

But I would suggest that on this score, perhaps we need to shift the grounds of diagnosis. The liberals, with their insistence on steering popular pleasure away from 'vulgar' enjoyment and towards more 'world-class' fare, are just as invested in normative symbolic orders as their ostensible opponents on the conservative side. My point here is not simply to argue that liberal and conservative elements of the Indian middle classes turn out to be allied against the subalterns. Instead, I am arguing that middle-class discourse has to invent 'the masses' as a locus for both the inertia and the haptic volatility that it cannot acknowledge in itself. And it is this invented mass subaltern that censorship discourse institutionalizes — not so much to keep the great unwashed from the gates as to prevent middle-class desire from having to confront the obscene pleasure of its own unwashed body.

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14

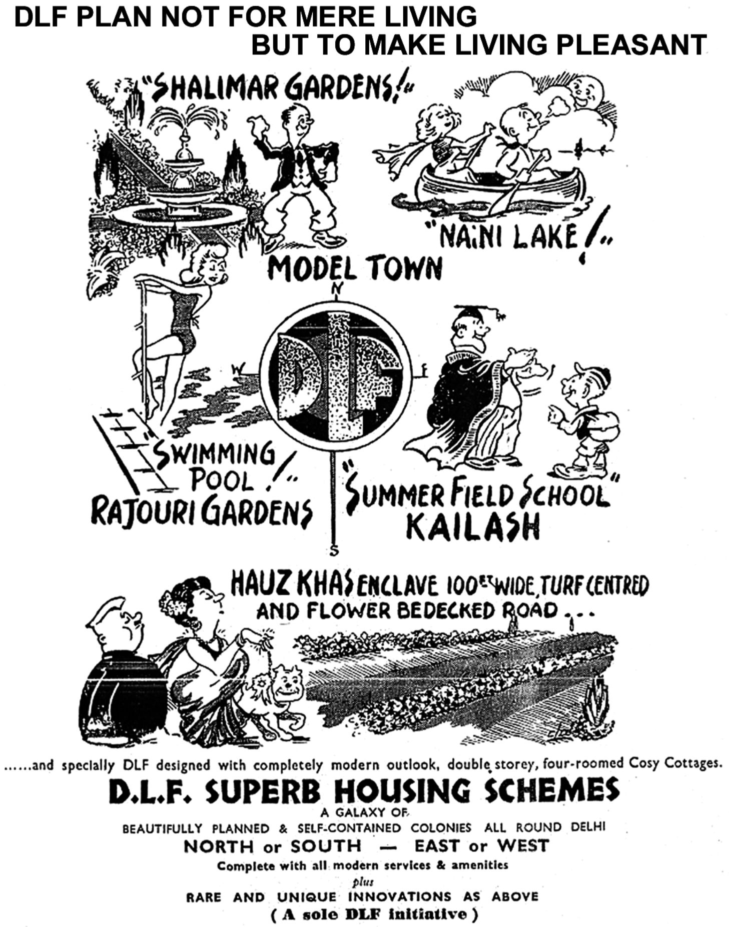
Urban Spaces, Disney-divinity and the Moral Middle Classes in Delhi

Sanjay Srivastava

Introduction

This essay is about the uses of space in the making of urban identities and, in particular, some ideas that might gather around the notion of a modern middle-class identity. 'Middle class' is, of course, a very vast and somewhat amorphous term, so the unstated background to my discussion is the idea that in India there are several *self-definitions* of what it is to be middle-class, and that a very large number of groups, with quite different socio-economic characteristics, describe themselves as 'middle-class' (see, for example, Favero 2003; Fernandes 2006; Mankekar 1999; Mazzarella 2003; Rajagopal 2001).

As considerable scholarship for both Western and non-Western contexts demonstrates (for example, King 1976, 2004; Kusno 2000; Low and Lawrence-Zúniga 2003; Massey 1996), 'spatial strategies' (Deshpande 2000) constitute one of the most significant ways in which social processes are both expressed and experienced. Modern Delhi is a good example of this. From the making of New Delhi, to the establishment of the Delhi Improvement Trust (DIT) in 1937, through to its successor body the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) in 1957, and then to current real-estate behemoths such as the DLF company, urban space has been a significant site for the expressions of numerous ideologies of community life (Plate 14.1 shows an advertisement from 1955). This essay grows out of a larger project on the history and ethnography of urban space in Delhi since 1937, the year in which DIT was established. The Trust's original brief was 'slum clearance' in the Old City; however, it rapidly became the location of a number of debates about the relationship between space, the circulation of bodies, the management of difference, and the spatial expression of urban colonial and postcolonial modernity (on some of these aspects, see, for example, Hosagrahar 2007; Legg 2007).



DLF PLAN NOT FOR MERE LIVING BUT TO MAKE LIVING PLEASANT

"SHALIMAR GARDENS!"
"NAINI LAKE!"
MODEL TOWN
N
W
E
DLF
"SWIMMING POOL!"
RAJOURI GARDENS
"SUMMER FIELD SCHOOL"
KAILASH
S
HAUZ KHAS ENCLAVE 100FT WIDE, TURF CENTRED AND FLOWER BEDECKED ROAD...

......and specially DLF designed with completely modern outlook, double storey, four-roomed Cosy Cottages.

D.L.F. SUPERB HOUSING SCHEMES

A GALAXY OF
BEAUTIFULLY PLANNED & SELF-CONTAINED COLONIES ALL ROUND DELHI
NORTH or SOUTH — EAST or WEST
Complete with all modern services & amenities
plus
RARE AND UNIQUE INNOVATIONS AS ABOVE
(A sole DLF initiative)

Plate 14.1. DLF Advertisement, 1955.
Source: Delhi State Archives.

There exists in India an elaborate, though relatively un-mined, *postcolonial* history of the connections between space and identity. This history is made up of both statist projects as well as the urban imaginaries of the private sector; Plate 14.1 is but a fragment of the latter. In this essay, I focus upon two sites which appear to me to be important in the making of certain contemporary urban middle-class cultures and identities. These are (*i*) the massive Akshardham Temple complex of the Swaminarayan sect, located on the banks of the Yamuna in Delhi, inaugurated in November 2005, and, (*ii*) the Government of Delhi's Bhagidari scheme for citizen–state partnership. Through these ethnographic contexts, I want to explore what the making of metropolitan middle-class cultures might mean, and the ways in which these two sites might be related to each other.

Scholarship on the relationship between urban *residential* patterns and class has a well-established history (see, for example, Castells 1977; Sandhu 2003; Soni 2000; Thrift and Amin 1987), and this essay does not wish to add to it. I am, instead, interested in a more general context of the social uses of space. My project is perhaps more akin to the one recently pursued by de Koning who explores the making of 'new upper-middle class identities' (de Koning 2007: 66) in Cairo by focusing on upmarket 'American'-style coffee shops. The new-style Cairo coffee shops, de Koning says, 'function as a prism through which one can view the way local and global come together to create specific configurations of hierarchy and distinction, closeness and distance, and implement specific spatial regimes based on social segregation' (ibid.). This essay seeks to open up similar lines of discussion for India, but for *non* upper-middle contexts. It is here — a space of uncertainty about class identity — that questions about what it is to be 'middle-class' are to be most vigorously debated.

The Akshardham Temple complex in Delhi

The Akshardham Temple complex, spread over an area of around 100 acres, was completed in November 2005 by the Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS), one of the major subsects within the Swaminarayan movement (see Brosius 2010). The Swaminarayan movement is located within the Bhakti tradition, and its founder, Bhagwan Swaminarayan, known as Ghanshyam at birth, was born into a Brahmin family in 1781 in a small village near Ayodhya. BAPS's literature tells us that 'having mastered the scriptures by the age of seven, he renounced home at 11 to embark upon an 11-year spiritual pilgrimage on foot across the length and breadth of India' (BAPS n.d. 3). And that 'eventually settling in Gujarat, he spent the next 30 years spearheading a socio-spiritual revolution' (ibid.). During his travels, Ghanshyam was bestowed with several names, including Neelkanth, eventually coming to be known as Swaminarayan. At the turn of the 18th century, Neelkanth met the ascetic Ramananda Swami and was anointed by him as his spiritual heir. However, he was to establish an independent following that culminated in the Swaminarayan sect. Neelkanth's travels ended in Gujarat, where he built several temples. Currently, the largest number of devotees come from Gujarat, followed by Rajasthan.

Since his death in 1830, doctrinal and other disputes have led to the emergence of a number of subgroups of the movement founded by Swaminarayan. These include the 'original' Swaminarayan Satsang; BAPS; the Swaminarayan Gurukul; and the Shree Swaminarayan Gadi Sansthan. As mentioned earlier, the Akshardham Temple in Delhi belongs to BAPS, which came into being in 1906, and is currently led by the fifth of the succession of Gurus, the 85-year-old Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

All Swaminarayan subgroups have a global following, with a predominance of Gujaratis, and there are temples belonging to the different sub-groups in various cities in North America, the UK and Europe. These include New York, Houston, Los Angeles, Dallas, Washington DC, London, Leicester, Birmingham, Milan, Paris, and Lisbon. In fact, as Rachel Dwyer points out, the movement has become 'the dominant form of British Hinduism' (Dwyer 2004: 180), as well as 'the dominant form of transnational Gujarati Hinduism' (ibid.: 181). Williams (1984) estimated the global following of the movement to be around five million, though this figure is now likely to be much higher, with BAPS itself estimated to have a following of over a million (Dwyer 2004).

The backbone of BAPS is an order of all-male 'Swamis', currently numbering around 700, who carry out a variety of religious, 'social' and administrative tasks in various parts of India and globally. All Swamis are celibate and once they have broken ties with their families, they are forbidden to make direct contact again. BAPS 'regulations' on recruitment into the order of the Swamis require that applicants must be over 21 as well as university graduates. This rule was introduced quite recently by the current head of the temple complex in Delhi, who is himself a graduate of the Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi.

The activities of BAPS include organizing 'International Cultural Festivals', running educational facilities and hospitals, providing 'environmental care', conducting 'mass marriages' and providing 'marriage counselling', 'tribal care', and, organizing 'Family Assembly Campaigns'. To strengthen family bonds, 25,000 homes have been inspired to conduct family Assemblies, wherein all the family members 'daily sit together [*sic*] for half an hour to pray to God, discuss their day and understand each other'. BAPS's temple complex in London includes the 'Sri Swaminarayan Haveli [mansion] . . . [which] is a fascinating work of wooden craftsmanship, created out of Burmese Teak and British Oak. Not in the last 100 years has such a Haveli of intricate carvings has [*sic*] been built anywhere in the world, not even in India' (BAPS n. d.: 14). The Haveli was 'selected as one of the 70 wonders of the world by Reader's Digest, 1998', was '[r]ecognized by "Guinness World Records" since 1997 [*sic*] as the largest Hindu stone mandir in the western hemisphere. Featured in National Geographic magazine and Royal Commission on the Historic Monuments of England . . . [and received] Britain's "Most Enterprising Building Award 1996," from the Royal Fine Art Commission' (ibid.).

There is another Akshardham Temple complex in Gandhinagar (Gujarat), consisting of 23 acres of land with 15 'interactive exhibitions, surround settings . . . 14-screen multimedia show — Integrovision . . . the world's first spiritual multimedia show . . . [which] received the Bronze award at the International Audio-Visual and Multimedia Festival in 1993 at Munich, Germany' (ibid.:15). The Delhi temple, though on a larger scale, is modelled on the Gandhinagar one.

The spirit of things: Design, construction and layout

Discussions to build the Akshardham Temple complex began in 1968, and by 2000, BAPS had acquired around 30 acres of the land at the present site, with the holding eventually increasing to 100 acres. There had been considerable public controversy over the manner in which such a large area of ecologically sensitive land had been allotted for the construction of the temple. During 2003–04, newspaper reports suggested that the ruling National Democratic Alliance (NDA), of which the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was the dominant partner, had smoothed the way for BAPS to take over the land by violating or amending building and planning norms. In brief, there was the general belief that the

'Hindutva leanings' of the NDA had been a critical factor in the entire episode. How-ever, in 2005, the Supreme Court came to the decision that the construction had been 'lawful', and that 'all the Land Use Plans have been adhered to'.[1]

Construction of the complex began in November 2000, with Chief Architect Virendra Trivedi overseeing the project. Trivedi was described as someone with 'temple construction in his genes', as his grandfather had renovated the Dilwara temples at Mount Abu, and his father had designed Swaminarayan temples at Chicago and Houston (ArchiDesign Perspective 2006). In fact, Trivedi had been assigned the task of designing the monument as early as 1994.

From Delhi, the most direct approach to the temple is via the Hazrat Nizamuddin bridge that spans the Yamuna. Completed in 1994, the bridge was subsequently widened, the task having been undertaken in collaboration with a Japanese company. On the western (or Delhi) end of the bridge is the new Sarai Kale Khan flyover, and as one crosses over (eastwards) towards the locality of Mayur Vihar and then into Uttar Pradesh, in the distance, to the right of the bridge, is the Delhi–Noida–Delhi (DND) tollway which provides high-speed access between south Delhi and NOIDA. Located in Uttar Pradesh, the New Okhla Industrial Development Area, or NOIDA, has become an important residential and commercial locality, gradually evolving into an outlying suburb of Delhi.[2] The road that leads to the temple complex itself comes off the eastern end of the Nizamuddin bridge, across the river, on National Highway 24 that leads to Lucknow. The massive dome of the temple is visible from some distance, and the turn-off to the complex is immediately before a new clover-leaf flyover, which is another route to NOIDA. In November 2009, the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation inaugurated the Akshardham metro station as part of its expanding network in the city; not far from the temple complex is the site for the 2010 Commonwealth Games 'village'. From the Games as well as the temple sites one can see the rubble and remains of the riverside *jhuggi-jhopri* (JJ) or slum colony called Nangla Machi, which was demolished in 2006 and whose residents have been mostly 'resettled' approximately 40 km away on the northern borders of Delhi, near the village of Savda Ghevda. Nangla Machi was demolished on the orders of the Delhi High Court.[3] Earlier rounds of slum removal from the banks of the Yamuna river were intended, according to government sources, to pave the way for a 'beautification' drive which would see the construction of shopping plazas and arcades, promenades, and various leisure facilities.[4] In 2004, the then minister of Urban Development and Tourism noted that '[T]he over 220-acre Yamuna bed will . . . be redeveloped as a "national hub", with memorials, tourist spots and historical monuments', and that he intended to 'connect the river to India's ancient history which is the Indraprastha ruins, medieval history which means the Red Fort and contemporary history, which is represented by the August Kranti Park from where the Prime Minister addresses the nation on 15 August'.[5]

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[1] 'Akshardham Construction Lawful: SC', *The Tribune*, 13 January 2005. The 'Hindutva' angle, though a significant backdrop, is not the explicit focus of this article. I have, however, noted in the following sections how it plays out in aspects of the temple's spatio-national discourse.

[2] Since the mid-1980s, when it first began to become popular as a residential destination, NOIDA has experienced marked increases in real-estate values. The virtual monopoly of land in Delhi by the DDA has meant an increasing number of private real-estate developments in the bordering states of Uttar Pradesh and Haryana.

Visitors arrive at Akshardham Temple by chartered buses, taxis, autorickshaws, or private vehicles. Buses and cars are directed to a massive parking area, not unlike those that surround large shopping malls in Western countries. Temple volunteers check underneath all cars with reflective security devices. Others are at hand to direct vehicles to vacant parking slots. Frequent announcements over the public address system inform visitors that they cannot carry into the complex electronic goods such as mobile phones and cameras, or other objects such as water bottles. On most days, long queues form at the security gates, kept in order by a winding metal barrier. There are three security checks, including bodily frisking and inspection with metal detectors. Beyond the security enclosure is the Mayur (Peacock) Gate, decorated with 869 peacocks, which forms the entrance to the main complex. Also on display at the entrance are eight water screens. Passing through the Gate, visitors move into a large hall with marble flooring, dim lighting, potted plants, and information counters. Behind the counters sit well-presented young women wearing 'corporate' saris. Along the walls are various displays regarding the complex and the sect. The hall has the feel of a five-star hotel lobby.

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[3] 'No Slum, Walk Along Yamuna', *Indian Express*, 14 January 2004. The High Court order was passed in 2002, though Nangla Machi was only demolished in 2006.

[4] Amita Baviskar, 'Tale of Two Cities', *The Hindu*, 30 May 2004.

[5] 'No Slum, Walk Along Yamuna', *Indian Express*, 14 January 2004.

Beyond the Mayur Gate and the hall, the complex is divided into different sections, and some of these attract an entry fee. In particular, a combined ticket for the Hall of Values (also known as Sahajanand Darshan), which screens an 'audio animatrix show' depicting various scenes from Swaminarayan's life, Neelkanth Darshan (an IMAX theatre), and Sanskruti Vihar (a boat ride through '10,000 years of Indian history') costs ₹ 125. A musical fountain — Yagnapurush Kund — with an entry fee of ₹ 20, a 27-feet-high brass statue of Neelkanth (the young Swaminarayan), the 'Garden of Values', and the temple itself, surrounded by a moat, make up the remaining key attractions.

'Mystic India' in a hundred thousand ways

Ramesh Swami is in charge of four of the major attractions at Akshardham. He oversees the running of the hi-tech Hall of Values, the IMAX cinema, the '10,000 years' boat ride, and the musical fountain. In his late twenties, Ramesh Swami was born in south London, and joined the order at the age of 18. While still at school, he had visited a Cultural Festival of India (CFI) organized by a BAPS chapter in the USA. During the course of fieldwork, I was told by Akshardham's Public Relations in-charge, Rajan Swami, that Ramesh Swami had earlier done some modelling for 'Jo Jo Armani' in the UK. Ramesh Swami's office is a massive, air-conditioned room, and at our first meeting, he sat behind a desk at one end of the hall, occasionally receiving calls on his mobile phone and giving instructions. My work at the complex was made easier by the fact that both Ramesh Swami and Rajan Swami were well-acquainted with someone I had come to know through fieldwork on an earlier project on middle-class schooling. Rajiv Kishore had been a teacher when I first met him in the early 1990s, and is now the headmaster of a private school in the east Delhi locality of Mayur Vihar, a stone's throw from Akshardham. The school was established by the owner of a local construction company which had made its fortune through the spurt of residential and other construction activity in east Delhi during the 1980s. Kishore mentioned that he wanted to introduce his students to a 'different kind of Hinduism', one that was 'clean' as well as 'global', and that he had made friends with the Swamis as he admired the way they were seeking to realign religious practice to the needs of a 'new' cultural and economic environment.

The complex is open on all days except Mondays, the day for maintenance as well as *shivir* (lit. 'camp'; gathering or meeting) for all the volunteers who work there. For six busy days of the week, Ramesh Swami must ensure the smooth running of a host of technologically complex machinery and computer systems that form the backbone of Akshardham's key attractions. Most of the structures within the complex are made of pink sandstone, with the temple itself a mix of pink stone and white marble (see Plate 14.2). Ramesh Swami was keen to emphasize that all the design work during the construction had been undertaken by the Swamis, with the experts providing assistance. The other important aspect, he reiterated, concerned their ability to take quick decisions, using technology to achieve their planning-based objectives. So, at various times, Ramesh Swami would show me computer-generated photos that were used in the design and construction process. 'Several years ago', he said, 'Pramukh Swami [the BAPS head] noticed that it was very difficult

Plate 14.2. The Akshardham Temple in Delhi.

Source: Photograph by author.

to recruit Swamis, and he wanted to keep with the times in order that people were attracted to the order. Hence, he insisted on the introduction of the latest technology'. Ramesh Swami told me that the Swamis visited Disneyland and Universal Studios during the planning of the Akshardham Temple complex, and that many of the ideas in the exhibition hall are based on these two theme parks in the US. However, he added, 'our boat ride is 12 minutes long, whereas the one at Universal Studios is only 5 minutes'.

Those who choose to visit the fee-attracting sections begin with a show in the Hall of Values. The show begins in a semi-circular hall — dimly lit in the manner of a cinema-hall — where the audience faces a large back-lit mock-granite monolith that shows a hand chiselling away to reveal a face. 'Your life is in your hands', the narrator intones.

The Hall of Values, which actually consists of a series of halls, contains 15 3-D 'walk-through' dioramas and presentations from the life of the sect's founder. The life-sized mannequins in each diorama are animated through a combination of robotics, fibre optics, and light and sound. As the audience takes its place, the mannequins spring to life, portraying scenes from what we are told is 18th-century India. There is the young Neelkanth performing miracles, giving wise counsel, being acclaimed by kings and poor farmers, and rewarding those who stayed faithful to his cause. So, in the first tableau, standing amidst a pond, the boy-Swaminarayan convinces two fishermen to give up their work and turn vegetarian.

There are sitting mannequins that, startlingly, stand up; life-like scenes in forests; and village scenes depicting Swaminarayan in acts of helping the poor, giving religious discourse, teaching students, helping the sick, etc. We arrive at the village tableau, the last exhibition in the Hall of Values, by crossing a mock-rickety bridge, past a series of waterfalls and scenes depicting rainfall. The idealized-village exhibition uses spotlights that illuminate different tableaux involving Swaminarayan. One can choose either English or Hindi commentary.

Neelkanth Darshan, an IMAX show on an 85' x 65' screen, is next. The film charts the life of Bhagwan Swaminarayan from childhood to adulthood, focusing on certain key events. A pretty little boy acts as young Neelkanth, and then an androgynous teenage actor takes up the role of the adult Swaminarayan. The teenage actor is slim, has high cheekbones and full lips. He, or she, is an almost perfect copy of the feminized imagery of Ram and Shiv often to be found in Indian calendar art. The story is a kind of a travelogue that ranges across India, starting from Ayodhya, Neelkanth's birthplace, and ending in Gujarat, where he eventually settled. A colonial map of India, with 19th-century spellings of Indian towns, flickers across the screen, with footprints appearing in chronological order to indicate the places Neelkanth/Swaminarayan passed through. The footprints trace a route along the east coast of India, then down to Kanyakumari, and subsequently up the west coast to end in Gujarat. There are spectacular shots of the Himalayas, valleys, rivers, and coastal locations. There is extensive use of aerial photography. Indian and German film-makers, who had been hired to make the film, used computer-generated shots of Mansarovar Lake, as the Chinese authorities did not give permission for shooting on location in Tibet. Retitled 'Mystic India', the film has also been screened in IMAX theatres around the world.

Ramesh Swami explained the system of crowd management at the fee-paying venues as follows: 'At the start', he said,

> we have about six or seven shows of about 70 people each in Hall 1 [i.e., the Hall of Values]. At the conclusion of these shows, we have gathered around 500 people. They are then allowed into the IMAX, and when this finishes, they move on to the boat ride, and the whole crowd is cleared in about 50 minutes.

He was keen to emphasize the significance of 'time management' in the smooth running of the venues. This, he said, helps to maximize the volume of the traffic. This aspect came up in our various discussions, including the one about the 'record time' in which both the musical fountain and the brass statue of Swaminarayan had been built. As he put it, 'experts' were amazed that the entire temple complex had been completed in just five years. Temporal modernity is, however, interwoven with an ancient one, which itself presaged the modern present. So, a temple document, amidst a numerical listing of the fountain's features — 2,870 steps, 108 small shrines, etc.—notes that 'its perfect geometric forms testify to ancient India's advanced knowledge in mathematics and geometry'.[6]

Following the Neelkanth Darshan IMAX show, we move on to Sanskruti Vihar, the boat ride which is advertised as a 'journey into 10,000 years of Indian civilization in 10 minutes'.[7] The boats used for the ride are long ones — much like those in theme parks — that run along underwater tracks. The fore and aft sections are designed such that the vessels look like swans, an image that borrows from representations of 'ancient Hindu' culture in popular art forms such as Hindi cinema and calendar art. Once again, commentary in either English or Hindi is available. It consists of descriptions of the variety of life-sized tableaux along both banks. So, we move from the ancient period depicting, among other things, Indian 'achievements' in the fields of astronomy, medicine (including 'plastic surgery'), armament manufacturing and warfare, astrology, 'democratic governance', debating, schooling, 'the world's first university', mathematics, cattle rearing, maritime trade, and 'inventions by the great *rishi*-scientists of India'. There are also tableaux representing significant religious figures, and various famous personalities from Indian history. There are no representations of Muslims, or of Islamic contexts. The boat ride ends at a tableau where cardboard cut-outs of *modern* Indians look out from houses and other urban locations, and the commentary asks that 'we' build upon the heritage of India's ancient civilization for a better future.

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[6] www.akshardham.com (accessed 12 February 2007).

Apart from the above, visitors can also wander around without charge in the Garden of Values and, of course, in the supposed centrepiece of the complex, the temple monument. The Garden, also called Bharat Upvan, consists of manicured lawns and gardens containing a series of themed tableaux with life-sized bronze statues. Themes include 'India's Child Gems', 'Valorous Warriors', 'Freedom Fighters', 'National Figures', and 'Great Women Personalities'. As in the case of the boat ride, the children, women and men are exclusively drawn from Hindu contexts. From the relatively serene surroundings of the Garden, one can observe the speeding Metro rail and the hurly-burly of the traffic as it comes off the Nizamuddin bridge, heading towards the vast, new privately developed residential complexes of Ghaziabad in Uttar Pradesh, or taking the clover-leaf flyover towards NOIDA.

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[7] Given the obsession with precise enumeration, it is not clear why the 12-minute boat ride is advertised as lasting for 10.

According to Ramesh Swami, some 11,000 volunteers, artisans and sadhus contributed '300 million man hours' towards the construction of the complex adorned by the temple. The temple itself consists of '234 ornately carved pillars, nine ornate domes, 20 quadrangled *shikhar*s [spires], a spectacular Gajendra Pith [plinth of stone elephants] and 20,000 *murtis* [idols] and statues of India's great sadhus, devotees, acharyas and divine personalities'.[8] And, the Gajendra Pith plinth '[weighs] 3,000 tons, has 148 full-sized elephants, 42 birds and animals, 125 human sculptures and decorative stone backdrops of trees, creepers and royal palaces'. In temple information brochures, on its website, and even in conversations with the Swamis, the Akshardham Temple complex is presented as a slew of numbers, made concrete by hundreds of this, thousands of that, and millions of those.

The temple is surrounded by a moat — the Narayan Sarovar — and there is a pink stone colonnaded walkway that runs around it. The colonnade, with a total length of around 3,000 feet, is made of Rajasthani red-stone and consists of '1,152 pillars, 145 windows and 154 *samvaran shikhars* [Pillars of Great Restraint] amounting to a total of 53,956 stones'.[9]

Mystic India in the time of surplus and moral consumption

Akshardham embodies a number of separate processes that are collapsed into the making of a new culture of consumption and urban space. How do we think about Akshardham in terms of a 'particular constellation of social relations, meeting and weaving together at a particular locus' (Massey 1996: 154)? To begin with, I would like to refer to the processes of consumption that gather around Akshardham as those of surplus and moral consumption. Second, I would like to suggest that another way of understanding the making of this new urban space is to see it as one strand within broader processes of contemporary urban developments that relate to the idea of *becoming* 'middle-class' through certain practices of residence and housing.

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[8] www.akshardham.com (accessed 12 February 2007).

[9] Ibid.

The Akshardham Temple complex is part of a wider, and massive, socio-spatial transformation that is taking place in Delhi and various other Indian cities. In particular, the making of 'clean' spaces such as Akshardham proceeds apace with the removal of 'unclean' spaces such as *jhuggi-jhopri* (JJ) colonies. So, according to one estimate, between 2000 and 2006, 53 different JJ colonies were demolished in Delhi. These forced evictions affected approximately 79,000 families (between 400,000–500,000 people), with the majority being 'resettled' in outlying areas of Delhi (Hazards Centre 2006). The 'cleared' land is to be put to various uses, including new leisure and commercial activities. As mentioned earlier, Akshardham sits just across the river from the erstwhile JJ colony of Nangla Machi, demolished in 2006. There is a telling relationship that each of these sites has to discourses of legality and illegality. Whereas the politico-spiritual clout enjoyed by Akshardham effaces the notion of 'encroachment', for JJ colonies, there is no such room for manoeuvre.

Based on observations over a number of months, it is possible to outline certain characteristics of the visitors to Akshardham Temple. First, they are, apart from the sundry foreign visitors, almost exclusively non-English speaking. In addition, unlike visitors to theme parks such as Disneyland, the visitors do *not* appear to be those from 'the upper-middle classes, bosses rather than workers' (Zukin 1993: 232). While on weekends and public holidays, the car park is frequently full, a large number of vehicles are buses and taxis that have been hired by groups. Second, extended family and larger groups predominate, while individual and 'nuclear' families are extremely rare among the visitors. Third, there are substantial numbers of women, and all-women groups are not an uncommon sight.

If the temple complex is part of the making of urban middle-classness, it is a very particular fraction that is its audience and patron. It is in this sense, perhaps, that we might speak of a 'new' middle-classness that brings together the various strands of a new consumer culture, relations with the state and with religiosity, discourses of clean and unclean urban spaces, and, as I discuss below, certain anxieties about the relationship between consumption and 'true' 'Indianness'.

Scholarship on shopping malls in the United States suggests that mall designers incorporate a specific motif in their design brief: viz., the ability of the mall 'to contrast positively with the experience of everyday environment in the surrounding space' (Gottdiener 2003:131). Though Akshardham is part of the larger configuration of urban spaces which also includes Delhi's shopping malls, its relationship to its patrons is different. *This* theme park, with its appeal to Indian antiquity and 'ancientness', is not, in fact, a context of nostalgia that separates its space from that which is outside. Akshardham's appeal lies in that it is able to present its tableau of consumption (of objects and spaces) as contiguous with the world outside. Its self-representation in terms of technological mastery, efficiency, punctuality, educational achievement, and the broad context of contemporary consumerism links it with the world of tollways, highways, Metro rail, shopping malls, city 'beautification' and slum-clearance drives, and the creation of spaces of middle-class identity. Akshardham is, then, a space of passage, a threshold space, rather than a model of a sharply differentiated 'inside' from the 'outside' (cf. Chakrabarty 2002). The inside–outside model, one with a long history in anthropological theorizing, bears reappraisal in light of the contemporary strategies of consumption that fashion behaviours which, in turn, undo the boundaries between the 'inner' and the 'outer'.[10] The contemporary urban subject, ensconced within the various processes we now label 'globalization', is one located upon threshold spaces, which are in themselves both the sites and the products of these processes. The Akshardham Temple complex is one such space, in the midst of, rather than removed from, the processes of contemporary modernity; nostalgia has little appeal for an audience whose only memory of the immediate past is of the license-permit regime of the Five-Year Plan state where material benefits were largely sequestered by an industrial–bureaucratic elite.

Further, this theme park is based around the process of *surplus* consumption: the collapsing of time and space, and the refusal to consume 'rationally'. Surplus consumption refers to consumption behaviour that unfolds through recourse to cultural symbols, meanings and strategies generated across a number of time spans. The goods and experiences that are the objects of consumption are, as if, wrenched from a number of different contexts, which are then effaced through the contemporary acts of consuming them.

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[10] This has been more fully explored in Srivastava (2007).

Surplus consumption is the 'strategy of engaging with the intensity of social and cultural changes introduced by [a number] of global forces' (Srivastava 2007: 185).[11]

Surplus consumption unfolds in a number of ways, and is part of the processes of the making of contemporary urban identities. To begin with, consumption is part of the Akshardham experience in the most literal sense. I have noted earlier that the entrance hall/lobby to the temple is designed in the manner of a five-star hotel. This — to impart the sense of a five-star hotel lobby — appears to be its key function. Further, visitors can supplement their experience through eating at the food hall that has the ambience of a localized McDonalds. There is also the well-stocked Akshardham shop which sells a wide variety of temple-related goods, including audio and video cassettes, calendars and diaries, DVDs, books, key chains, models of the temple, 3-D images of the current head of BAPS in which his eyes follow the viewer around the room, T-shirts, and Akshardham baseball caps. The shop also sells a wide variety of Ayurvedic and other herbal products.

I will now move on to other, more abstract forms of consumption at Akshardham. As mentioned earlier, visitors pay a combined entry fee for certain attractions, and then are shepherded from one venue to another, viz., the Hall of Values diorama, the IMAX theatre, and finally, the 'ancient India' boat ride. Here, the relationship between the audience and the attractions calls for some comment. The Hall of Values consists of a number of tableaux from the life of Swaminarayan, and at the conclusion of one 'episode', the crowd moves to the next room in order to view other parts of the story. However, after a while, a pattern of viewing is established: the audience senses when a particular show is about to conclude and, even before it finishes, the entire crowd rushes out of the hall into the next one in order to get the best seats. This pattern continues till the last show. By this time, it is not clear if anyone is actually interested in the 'message', since no one stays around till the end of a particular 'episode'. The rush to get the best seats in the next performance-space — a pattern of activity borrowed from a number of different contexts of Indian life — largely obliterates the notion of a contemplative audience awaiting spiritual enlightenment; the audience seeks the experience of the 'ancient' through the strategy of contemporary market behaviour.

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[11] My use of 'surplus' is not intended to draw upon its Marxist connotations. Rather, I seek to explore those notions of 'class' which involve *perceptions* of choice and self-making through 'lifestyle' strategies (Turner 1988).

The Garden of Values, the manicured series of lawns with its tableaux of 'famous' Indian men, women and children, is another key attraction. In order to get to the Garden one must pass a small pool of water with a pair of large marble footprints symbolizing those of Swaminarayan. Some onlookers stand in reverence, eyes closed, then throw money into the pond, while others discuss what boon they might ask for, and still others merely read the plaque and then move on to the Garden of Values. On one of my visits, a group of male NCC (National Cadet Corps) cadets were wandering around the Garden, with members offering various loud comments, typical of which was the one directed at Mahatma Gandhi: 'what a body!'.

Visitors to the Akshardham Temple traverse spatialized sensoria marked by, among other things, intensely grounded mnemonics that foreground the body of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, (Hindu) nationalist inter-pretations of Indian history, and globally inspired (and sourced) hi-tech religious robotics and other visual displays. One of the most significant aspects of the overall experience of the interaction can be captured through the notion of 'glancing', where the relation-ship between humans and gods is not structured by intensity, defined in terms of a sustained and focused temporal relationship between the devotee and the divine. Rather, the relationship is in the nature of an 'extensive' — or surplus — one. Akshardham, then, provides a space for building cultural identities through the consolidation of the capacity for multiple engagements: with nation-alism, technology, concrete educational achievement, the cultures of diasporic Hinduism, modern building techniques, the manage-ment of time, the dominance of Hindu spirituality over modern technology, the beauty of flyovers, global leisure industries, and, of course, 'ancient' Hindu culture. It is a threshold space for our times, and those who occupy it move in and out of a number of what were earlier separable temporal, and hence cultural, domains; nothing is now out of fashion, and time unfolds in swirls of possibilities, rather than as linear periods and eras.

In this context, the interaction with the visual, aural and concrete aesthetics at the temple complex is also the making of a *moral middle class* through a process of moral consumption. This is a context where the active participation in consumerism is accompanied by an anxiety about it and its relationship to 'Indianness'. So, Ramesh Swami, Rajan Swami and Rajiv Kishore, my school principal friend, often resorted to a very particular discourse of the relationship between frugality, which they perceived to be a significant aspect of Hindu religiosity, and the opulent nature of the complex, and hence the expenditure that would have been incurred in its construction. Their explanations cohere around what could be called 'retractable modernity' and the making of a moral middle class (see Srivastava 2007).

The making of a moral middle class, one that has control over the processes of consumption, and hence modernity, is, in fact, located in the processes of (surplus) consumption itself. For it is only through consumption that one can demonstrate *mastery* over it. So, one consumes a wide variety of products of contemporary capitalism — IMAX cinema, the Disneyfied boat ride, Akshardham baseball caps — in combination with 'spiritual' goods such as religion and nationalism. What differentiates the moral middle class from others is its *capacity* to take part in these *diverse* forms of consumption, whereas a more 'de-racinated' (or 'Westernized') middle class might only be able to consume the products of capitalism. Here, the refashioning of urban space tells us something about ideas of different kinds of middle-classness and their perceived relationship to consumption practices. This also constitutes a narrative of the imagined relationship between space and identity. I have explored this idea elsewhere in a discussion of 'women's' magazines such as *Grihalakshmi* and *Grihashobha* (Srivastava 2007). There I have suggested that the side-by-side positioning of extraordinarily explicit articles on sex and sexuality with those on religious 'values', rituals and texts should be understood in the context of the process of moral consumption. That is to say, as the activities of a class that sees itself as 'truly' Indian because it is not defined by foreign modernity, but is, rather, able to define its own version; *this* middle class can take part in the processes of modernity, but also 'pull back' and return to 'tradition'. And, the process of consumption is simultaneously one of establishing its 'morality': for it is only through an intense engagement with consumerism that the ability to withdraw to the realms of tradition can be demonstrated. Hence, it is in this sense that Akshardham represents a space for the making of a moral middle-class identity, simultaneously as it is located in the various processes of surplus consumption.

Finally, moral consumption, while it applies to both men and women, is particularly able to account for *women* as new consumers. They revel in the spiritual-commodity space of Akshardham, roaming in family groups or with other women, secure in the knowledge of their capacity to withdraw to the realm of the family etiquette and 'true' Indianness. So, we might say that in this context, the class politics of 'distinction' (Bourdieu 1984) takes a detour through the postcolonial politics of 'tradition' and 'modernity' (Chatterjee 1993).[12]

Surplus consumption — the collapsing of leisure, religiosity, 'work-ethic', sacrifice ('volunteering'), ideas about new urban spaces (highways, tollways, flyovers), nationalist heroes, filmic landscapes, and slum clearance — is, then, a manifestation of the socio-spatial transformations currently underway in Delhi. These transformations unfold across a number of sites, which in turn form the unified grounds for the elaboration of a specific, and new, narrative of urban life. In the next section, I provide a brief outline of another such site, concerned with housing, in order to illustrate the mutually reinforcing nature of the spatialized narratives of contemporary urbanism in India.

'Interesting findings from sleep research' and urban citizenship

The Delhi government-sponsored Bhagidari scheme, described as a citizen–government partnership programme, was inaugurated in 2000. Through it, representatives of the Residents' Welfare Associations (RWAs) and Market Traders' Associations (MTAs) interact with key government officials (and sometimes with the Chief Minister) at periodically organized workshops. The scheme recently achieved global recognition when it was awarded a UN Public Service award in 2005. The 'authorized colony', registered with the

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[12] I am grateful to Amita Baviskar for suggesting this interpretation.

Registrar of Cooperative Societies, is the unit of affiliation within the scheme, and is represented at workshops and other Bhagidari-related events by office-holders of the colony's RWAs. Typically, the workshops bring together RWA and MTA members, officials of the police, water and electricity bodies, the tax department, the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD), the DDA, and the various District Commissioners. At present, the scheme involves around 1,600 'citizen groups' representing some three million of Delhi's population. Bhagidari workshops are organized according to administrative zones, and officials and residents connected with different zones are expected to interact over a period of three days through following a set agenda:

> Each workshop . . . will have participants seated in a table-wise arrangement. Each table has 4 citizens (2 each from 2 citizen groups, viz., Residents Welfare Association or Market Traders Association) and 5–6 officials of Public Utility Departments. Care is taken to seat area officials of Public Utility Departments at the table where representatives from citizen groups of their area are sitting. In a workshop, around 30–35 such table arrangements are made. (Government of Delhi 2002: 7)

The workshops are facilitated by Asian Centre of Organisation Research and Development (ACORD), an NGO which has been specially contracted for the purpose. There is also interaction between RWA and MTA representatives and state functionaries beyond the workshops, including regular meetings with police officials, District Commissioners and a variety of other functionaries whose responsibilities relate to residential and commercial issues.

The RWAs which meet under the Bhagidari umbrella cannot, of course, be treated as a homogenous group, since they represent localities with widely differing socio-economic characteristics. Hence, we must be mindful of the fact that 'RWAS constitute an increasingly mixed bag, with enormous variations in composition, concerns, modes of engagement, and political relations' (Coelho and Venkat 2009: 358), and that they reflect 'the fractured and at times contradictory nature of claims made by different sections of the middle class' (Kamath and Vijayabaskar 2009: 369). Notwithstanding this, I would like to suggest that the Bhagidari idea produces a consensus around the notion of urban citizenship and space, and a common set of issues that affect all 'middle-class' residents of the city. It is, in effect, both a consequence of the consolidation of new ideas on middle-classness as well as a part of the process of producing them. Hence, inspired by global theories of corporate governance, and psychological theories of human interaction, Bhagidari workshops produce significant visions of the contemporary city and life within it. Here, participants sing and dance to a specially written Bhagidari anthem (praising citizen–state 'cooperation'), while wearing specially designed baseball caps and waving colourful flags. It is a fascinating vision that marries the idea of the consuming — perhaps 'McDonaldized' (Ritzer 1993) — citizen to a transparent and responsive state machinery. Here, citizenry and the state are tightly entwined through the ideas of legality, cooperation, criminality, transparency, and the right and responsibilities of the citizen with respect to the city.

In the Foreword to the first Bhagidari Working Report (Government of Delhi 2001), Chief Minister (CM) Shiela Dikshit noted that 'The participation of citizens in governance is fundamental to democracy . . . Successful and meaningful governance cannot be achieved without their [citizens'] participation. To this end, I had initiated the concept of "Bhagidari": the Citizen–Government partnership'. The Report went on to say that the key Bhagidari public event — the workshops — would be organized around the principle of

> The Large Group Interactive Event (LGIE) . . . [and] must span at least two-and-a-half days (if not three) with two nights in between. This is based on interesting findings from sleep research, that during sleep, the day's discussions and experiences in the small and large group, are 'processed' by the participants [*sic*] 'subconscious' minds. Only after such 'subconscious' processing for two successive nights does the phenomenon of 'paradigm-shift' (or 'change in the mind-set and attitude') take place in 80% to 90% of the participants at the 'experiential level'. (Ibid.: 7)

ACORD, the NGO in charge of managing the event, has experience in the area of 'Real Time Strategic Change'. Further, the Report noted, 'Since people do not function based only on logic and reasoning, the LGIE smoothly processes both reason and feeling simultaneously, to create "consensus" and "ownership" ("Left-brain/right-brain" integration of logic and emotion)' (ibid.: 9). The LGIE, it noted, has been tested in a number of global contexts, including the Municipal Corporation of Mexico City, and the Public Health Departments of Minneapolis, as well as the corporate offices of Boeing and Ford. Through a series of meetings and workshops since 2000, a 'Steering Group' has been established. The Bhagidari administrative team consists of the Chief Minister of Delhi; the Chief Secretary, Delhi Government; the Principal Secretary, Urban Development; the Principal Secretary to the CM; and the Heads of various civic and utility service organizations, which include the MCD, the Delhi Vidyut [Electricity] Board, the New Delhi Municipal Corporation, the Delhi Jal [Water] Board, and the Department of Environment and Forests.

Bhagidari workshops are usually held at a venue owned by the Sri Sathya Sai Baba religious sect, located in central Delhi, and the following discussion concerns the workshop involving the RWAs of north and north-west districts of Delhi, held in May 2005. The workshop began with the 'Bhagidari song': *'Hawa sudhar gayi, sadak sudhar gayi . . . har mushkil ki hal nikali, Bhagidari se bhagidari nikali . . . Meri Dilli main hi sanwaroo . . . officer aye'* (the air is cleaner, the streets are better . . . a solution has been found for every problem, Bhagidari has led to sharing . . . I will nurture my Delhi . . . Officers came). An ACORD employee told me that the song was based upon a 'village/folk' tune, and that it had been devised in order to encourage a view of the city as a community of village-like neighbourly bonds; the song, she added, could well be imagined as being sung by a wandering bard.

Following the opening ceremony, senior officials of various government departments were introduced and the audience was encouraged to write down questions to which it wanted responses. At the end of the day, these of the workshop were handed to the officials. The latter were to come back on day three of the workshop and provide 'answers'. Subsequently, on the other days, there were discussions on a number of issues, including: (*i*) police and RWA cooperation; (*ii*) servant verification; (*iii*) RWAs informing the police about those houses where both husband and wife went out to work (i.e., where houses were vacant during the day); (*iv*) 'inspection' of all unoccupied houses; (*v*) drawing up a list of maids, hawkers, plumbers, etc., in order to only allow 'authorized' people into the locality; (*vi*) the 'security threats' from JJ dwellers; and (*vii*) surprise check (by the police) on the private security personnel employed by the RWAs. It was also suggested that the

MCD and the police should be informed about 'those families that don't pay attention to the RWAs', and that these should be 'challaned' (penalized). The RWAs, it was further agreed, must have a list of all families within their purview.

Over the three days, the participants drew flowcharts, shared tables with their local police official (the Station House Officer) as well as various other state functionaries, and listened to the responses to their queries. For example, on the third day, the Deputy Commissioner of the MCD reported that by 2006, 'all jhuggi-jhopri (JJ) colonies along the Yamuna banks would be demolished', and that the area would be transformed into a 'tourist spot'. He was followed by the Deputy Commissioner of Police (north Delhi) who informed the audience about police activities regarding regular surveillance of 'bad characters' and 'history sheeters', and police cooperation with RWAs and Nagarik Suraksha Samitis (Citizen Security Committees, a police-sponsored network). He asked the RWAs to be a regular source of information on strangers and 'young men with mobiles and motorbikes, but with no obvious source of income'. The police, he concluded, was very active in 'JJ clusters', trying to prevent crime.

The Chief Minister arrived an hour before the closing time on the final day and addressed the gathering as well as mingled with it. The workshop ended in a party-like atmosphere, with all participants wearing Bhagidari baseball caps and waving flags of different colours. The official Bhagidari song was played and the entire crowd joined in the singing. Some in the crowd climbed on to the front-stage and performed a version of Punjabi Bhangra dance. The group managed to get the CM to join them, and then led the rest of the audience in the singing and the dancing. The final song, in Hindi, extolled the virtues of Bhagidari, and was played to the tune of 'Old Macdonald Had a Farm', along with enthusiastic clapping from the gathering.

Conclusion: Carnivals of caring, showgrounds of the state

For the past four years the Government of Delhi has also been organizing a 'Bhagidari Utsav' (Bhagidari Festival) at Pragati Maidan, the exhibition grounds established in 1982 on the eve of the Asian Games. The Utsav is normally held in either January or February. Pragati Maidan is the venue for a large number of 'trade' fairs, including the annual India International Trade Fair (IITF) which attracts mammoth crowds. From its inception, the IITF 'showcased' Indian industrial and commercial achievements, with exhibitions organized in the manner of a nationalist tableau, wherein states are allotted separate pavilions, each containing displays that highlight that state's industrial as well as 'cultural' aspects. Pragati Maidan shares some history with the venues built for the 'great' industrial exhibitions and fairs of the 19th century (Bennett 1988; Breckenridge 1989; Hoffenberg 2001). However, at the present time it has also transformed into a concentrated site for engagements with a transnational *consumerist* modernity. So, perhaps more than the state pavilions, it is the independent stalls displaying and selling a wide variety of consumer goods — mobile phones, MP3 players, TVs, clothing, etc. — that attract the most enthusiastic crowds. And while it is only an impressionistic observation based on visits to the IITF from the 1980s to the most recent one in 2010, the vast majority of the visitors appear to be people of modest economic means. Not poor, but certainly not the well-off. In fact, I visited the IITF in 2006 on a 'free' pass provided by a young man who lived in the JJ colony of Nangla Machi; his uncle worked at the grounds as a guard and had managed to get several such passes, which were distributed to friends and family.

As in the past, visitors to the Bhagidari Utsav in 2006 were those who had been sent invitations by their RWAs. Along with these, they were provided with meals and beverage coupons. In addition to the invitees, there were also schoolchildren, and 'helpers' wearing red-coloured 'Team Delhi' T-shirts and baseball caps. Outside the halls, there were dance performances by troupes from Rajasthan and Haryana, a Hindi film-song performance, a street play on the theme of AIDS, and schoolchildren making collage-art.

A giant stage had been set up inside one pavilion, and a series of abstract, electronically projected images danced on the screen that formed the backdrop. Cameras at the front of the hall transmitted the stage shows to large plasma screens placed around the cavernous building. All around this and other halls were stalls of the various departments of the Government of Delhi, including Electricity, Registrar of Cooperatives, the Fire Brigade, Delhi Police, Ministry of Women's Welfare, Ministry of Youth Affairs, and the Delhi Jal Board. Another hall housed the stalls of a number of RWAs, with small-scale models of their 'colonies' that showed the 'positive' effects of being part of the Bhagidari scheme. So, one tableau featured a model of an 'encroached' piece of land which was earlier used as a dumping ground and a commercial area, and which, after Bhagidari, had become a children's park. The scene was depicted through a 'Before' and 'After' split. In the 'After' model, there was a miniature fountain, miniature swings, and miniature cars that sat neatly upon miniature roads.

The Utsav took place over two days which were taken up with outdoor shows, speeches, award ceremonies chaired by the Chief Minister, and 'cultural' performances. Members of the Punjabi Akademi gave Bhangra performances, and a group of schoolchildren did a 'Santhal tribal' dance. In the evenings there were Qawwali performances. On the final day, the CM visited the RWA stalls and gave out a number of awards. Throughout the day, there was a festival-like atmosphere, and visitors appeared to enjoy the spectacle. Among the award winners was the Sadar Bazar Traders' Association for 'Best Upcoming Citizens' Group'.

It is perhaps appropriate that the Bhagidari scheme borrows the cultural capital acquired by Pragati Maidan as a space for progressive spectacles of the nation state, earlier in its industrial phase, and now as a facilitator of a globalized consumerist modernity. Here, through the Utsav, the city is experienced as a lively place, an electronically advanced space, a welcoming space (the provision of free beverage and meal coupons), a place of collective effort (the RWA stalls showcasing their achievements), a place of transparent governance (various government departments advertising the ease of availability of information about their activities), and a space of hope and transformation. The Utsav provides a space, both symbolically and literally, where the city is experienced as undergoing transformation through integration with global cultural and commercial economies. Pragati Maidan is a short distance from the Akshardham complex, and a stone's throw from the now-demolished Nangla Machi JJ cluster from where it drew a very large number of its service staff.

The spaces and relationships imagined and created by the Bhagidari scheme form the larger context for the establishment and fostering of the Akshardham Temple complex. Both Bhagidari and Akshardham address a similar audience, a class in search of middle-classness, and involved in the process of defining it through certain sets of personal strategies that relate to consumption, religiosity, spatial modernity, housing strategies, and relationships with the state.

So, as the Bhagidari scheme foregrounds the notion of the caring state through defining citizenship as acts of partnership between its various organs and the occupants of *legally* defined neighbourhoods, it also endorses and creates realms of illegality and exclusions. Further, these notions of legality and illegality are gathered around the trope of the consuming family. In turn, the consuming, middle-class, family is seen to be the rightful claimant of strategically situated spaces of leisure such as Pragati Maidan, and the residential spaces of 'colonies'. Finally, in this context, the family is endowed the right to separate itself from the processes of labour by seeking the removal of labourers, who are seen as 'threats' to its life-ways.

At another level, there is a particular relationship between citizens and the state, which while mediated by the market (where the Market Traders' Association wins citizenship awards), also constitutes a dialogue on moral consumption. So, within Bhagidari, the consuming family is the moral fulcrum, one that will promote as well as keep a check on a variety of activities such as cooperation with the state and consumerism. And at Akshardham, the state, the market and a religious sect come together to establish an urban space where ideas of moral consumption unfold.

However, the class identity attached to the acts of moral consumption is not always easy to pin down, and this context also points to the limits of the process of creating a middle-class identity. In recent times, RWAs have emerged as a significant force in urban affairs in Delhi. So, bodies such as the Residents' Welfare Association Joint Front (RWAJF) and United Residents' Joint Association have been at the forefront of agitations against 'faulty' privatization of public utilities and commercialization of residential spaces.[13] An unintended consequence, at least from the Government of Delhi's point of view, has been the creation of a sphere of contestation *against* the state that had created the context (through Bhagidari) of 'respectable' middle-classness in the hope of a deferential constituency; at Akshardham, we might remember, irreverent NCC boys poke fun at national icons and inattentive audiences scramble rowdily for seats at religious techno-shows. The moral middle class simultaneously elaborates and evades its vocation.

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[13] See, for example, 'RWAs Object to Mixed Land Use Policy', *The Hindu*, 27 March 2006, and 'Chinks Visible in RWAs Armour', *The Hindu*, 13 September 2006.

In sum, there is now a conjoined urban topography of moral middle-classness — which is only one of various other kinds — that stretches across the city, and is produced through a number of processes. This landscape is both a product as well as a process and relates to the procedures of the state, the manoeuvres of the market, the anxieties of urban life, and the positioning of the family within these contexts.

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Cows, Cars and Cycle-rickshaws: Bourgeois Environmentalists and the Battle for Delhi's Streets

Amita Baviskar

Introduction

With their constant traffic between people and things — road space and vehicles, buildings and trees, vendors and pedestrians — city streets bring together many differently located elements, material as well as symbolic, in order to constitute an embodied form of the public sphere. Just as other public spheres (such as, for instance, the media) have been the centre of debates about control and management, freedom and discipline, state regulation and citizens' rights, so also have city streets been the focus of contention. In addition to debates about regulating this public sphere, claims to the street bring to the fore a fundamental question: who constitutes an urban or civic public? How does political legitimacy accrue to different social groups? How is social belonging and exclusion determined?

This essay examines the ongoing emergence of a public sphere on Delhi's streets, a process in which middle-class concerns about creating social and spatial order have contended with an unruly 'republic of the streets' (Joyce 2003: 216). This republic, which accommodates an anarchic assembly of activities by variously situated social groups and individuals, has faced a 'relentless momentum towards [transformation] as a place of passage and traffic' above all else (ibid.). The mission of 'cleaning up' the street has targeted those who inhabit its margins, including vendors of food and other inexpensive items of mass consumption, beggars and performers. On the road, the presence of cows and cycle-rickshaws has attracted attempts at regulation and outright prohibition. In order to understand how a public sphere comes into being, this essay focuses on bourgeois activists as they deal with three mobile elements that navigate Delhi's streets — cows, cars and cycle-rickshaws — and the people who own, use and seek to control them. All three elements have been the subject of strenuous efforts at regulation by courts, citizens' groups and traders' associations. I interpret these conflicts as instances of bourgeois environmentalism, the (mainly) middle-class pursuit of order, hygiene and safety, and ecological conservation, through the public sphere. I argue that middle-class activists mobilize the discourse of 'public interest' and 'citizenship' to articulate civic concerns in a manner that constitutes a public that excludes the city's poorer sections. Similar strategies of exclusion have been witnessed in arenas other than the street: since economic liberalization started in the 1990s, Delhi has undergone large-scale social and spatial structuring that resulted in working-class citizens losing jobs and homes (Baviskar 2003, 2006, 2009; Baviskar et al. 2006; Menon-Sen and Bhan 2008). This displacement of the poor was a consequence of the closure of manufacturing firms and the removal of squatter settlements, state actions prompted by middle-class initiatives in the 'public interest' to cleanse the city's air and water.[1]

Economic liberalization in India has ideologically and materially empowered the urban elite to an unprecedented extent. As a privileged class, the elite feel entitled to live in a 'world-class' city, free from the 'nuisance' (to use the legal term) created by the presence of the poor and their squalid living conditions. With land deregulation, real-estate prices have soared such that the places occupied by the poor have become prime property, ripe for redevelopment as spaces for elite consumption. The dream of inhabiting a world-class city, enjoying a lifestyle of convenience and comfort, is fuelled by real-estate firms, manufacturers and retailers of consumer durables, the entertainment and hospitality industries, and, most of all, the media. It is the expansion of this corporate capital in India that provides the context in which urban projects are imagined and pursued. However, there is a basic contradiction between bourgeois citizens' claims to civic responsibility and environmentalism *and* the simultaneous rise of consumerism in the same social stratum, one facet of which is the explosive growth of personal-vehicle ownership. In other words, middle-class efforts at championing the public interest by cleaning up the city's streets are subverted by the class's own toxic enchantment with automobiles.

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[1] See Amita Baviskar, 'A Lifeline under Siege', *The Hindu Sunday Magazine*, 6 November 2005.

In analyzing the treatment of cows, cars and cycle-rickshaws in Delhi, I seek to address two conceptual and political concerns: (*i*) the production of a hegemonic notion of social and spatial order by bourgeois environmentalists through the public sphere; and (*ii*) the limits placed upon this project by the contradictory consciousness of the middle classes, as well as the resistance offered by subalterns and an internally differentiated state. On hegemony, Nancy Fraser argues that the public sphere produces consent by enabling

> [the] circulation of discourses that construct the common sense of the day and represent the existing order as natural and/or just, but not simply as a ruse that is imposed. Rather, the public sphere in its mature form includes sufficient participation and sufficient representation of multiple interests and perspectives to permit most people most of the time to recognize themselves in its discourses. People who are ultimately disadvantaged by the social construction of consent nonetheless manage to find in the discourses of the public sphere representations of their interests, aspirations, life problems, and anxieties that are close enough to resonate with their own lived self-representations, identities and feelings. (Fraser 1992: 139)

On Delhi's streets, too, discourses of environmentalism that displace the poor deploy the all-embracing notion of a 'public interest', pointing to its self-evident priority over the particularistic interests of the cow owners and rickshaw pullers. Even as their current practices are marginalized and proscribed, the poor still subscribe to the notion that these changes are both inevitable and desirable and that, in the future, they too will ultimately benefit from the transformation of landscapes and livelihoods effected by economic liberalization (see Ghertner 2011). It is the public sphere's ability to address the aspirations of subaltern groups by invoking the promise of belonging in the urban public — partial inclusion in the sphere of consumption, and perhaps even political participation — that produces consent among those facing displacement.

As a hegemonic ideal, the discourse of 'public interest' reaches out to and may be embraced by those it excludes. Yet the project of urban cleansing remains incomplete, its success uncertain.

The contingent character of this project — the elements that conspire to undermine the creation of a bourgeois social, 'natural' and spatial order — is not a result of subaltern antagonism alone, or the resistance offered by the object world or animate species (Mitchell 2002: 29–30), but is as much an outcome of the internal contradictions and limits of the entity we call the state and the social group we call the 'middle class'. Even statist projects which, over time, reveal themselves to have a sustained, coherent thrust (economic liberalization, for example) may be subverted by officials with other, conflicting agendas and understandings such that their success is not a foregone conclusion (Li 1999). At the same time, the middle classes, too, are divided into different fractions (those who feed cows as their religious duty and those who use rickshaws versus bourgeois environmentalists) *and* riven by their contradictory consciousness. Becoming modern citizens of a world-class city demands a zealous pursuit of the public interest, but through strategies that deny civic rights to a majority of urban residents. However, espousing the discourse of the public is not a simple ruse to preserve elite privilege. It requires reforming the self while also allowing the possibility of reform and upward mobility to subaltern groups. I argue that these contradictory impulses of exclusion and inclusion in the pursuit of public and private interests combine with the complex interdependencies between the middle classes, the state and the subalterns in order to enable 'the republic of the streets' to survive, albeit in a state of constant siege.

Knowing the city: Urban order and experience

In his celebrated essay 'Walking in the City', Michel de Certeau contrasts the panoptical view of New York City gained from the summit of the World Trade Centre with the practices of space enacted by those who walk the city's streets. The Tower affords a perspective for urban planners and cartographers who would remain aloof from the cityscape spread out before them. Yet, this 'panorama-city' is a theoretical simulacrum, a picture 'whose condition of possibility is an oblivion and a misunderstanding of practices' (de Certeau 1984: 93).

In this essay, I follow in de Certeau's footsteps to argue that the planned and readable city is indeed a fiction, utopian or dystopian, depending on one's point of view. However, this fiction has real effects in the lives of those who live 'down below'. I trace bourgeois visions of the planned and ordered city through everyday practices, in the courts, in the media and on the streets, and examine their effects on urban spaces and people. I attempt to show that the distance between bourgeois environmentalists' dreams and the everyday practices of city dwellers is marked by tensions and contradictions that act as a form of resistance, impeding the realization of middle-class ambitions. Thus, the spatial and social order that bourgeois environmentalists seek to impose is unravelled by the everyday interdependencies between state agents and citizens, and by the competing claims of the public and the private that need to be reconciled within the bourgeois citizen-self.

But first, here is what de Certeau says:

> The ordinary practitioners of the city live 'down below', below the thresholds at which visibility begins. They walk — an elementary form of this experience of the city; they are walkers, Wandersmänner, whose bodies follow the thicks and thins of an urban 'text' they write without being able to read it. These practitioners make use of spaces that cannot be seen; their knowledge of them is as blind as that of lovers in each other's arms . . . The networks of [their] moving, intersecting writings compose a manifold story that has neither author nor spectator. (de Certeau 1984: 93)

Cows

Michel de Certeau probably did not imagine that his urban walker could be a cow. His essay speaks of New York and Paris, cities where a cow on the street would be a remarkable sight, even an emergency, attracting fire engines, wailing police cars and gawking crowds. Yet, his observations are uncannily apposite when applied to cows that do commonly frequent Indian streets. Leaving *gobar* (dung) splatters in their wake, they write an urban text without reading it. Their bovine amble traces maps that are etched deep in memory — associations between particular places and nourishment: this *dalao* (garbage dump), that row of vegetable vendors. The everyday practices of urban cows delineate a carefully crafted route and set of activities: from home to forage and then to rest, often on road medians where the breeze from the passing traffic helps keep flies away, before setting off homewards once again. They swish their tails placidly, and rise unhurriedly to cross the road. Motorists may curse, but no one dares harm them. In fact, it is not unusual to see a car stopped in the middle of the road, a disembodied hand stretched out of the window to feed stale rotis to a cow in the middle of morning rush-hour traffic.

Where do cows come from? In the University of Delhi campus, where the footpaths along the main avenue of Chhatra Marg offer a veritable obstacle course in gobar-dodging, cows come from the 'village' of New Chandraval which lurks behind the neat grid of by-lanes and *gali*s (alleys) in Jawahar Nagar and Kamla Nagar. Developed in the 1950s as planned residential localities, now increasingly commercial, with the ground floor of most houses given over to shops and restaurants, these neighbourhoods came up right next to the settlement of New Chandraval. The village is called 'New' because most of its residents were shifted from their original site 3 km away in order to make way for a waterworks.[2] In the spatial classificatory scheme of the Delhi Development Authority (DDA), New Chandraval is an 'urban village', an oxymoron that neatly sums up its hybrid present. Just behind the neon glare and noise of Kamla Nagar, a dense cluster of narrow streets opens out unexpectedly into a yard where old men sit on a *charpai* (string-bed) and smoke a hookah; buffaloes chew cud and young women shape cow-dung cakes right next to a parked Maruti 800 car. This is where the cows come home, when they are done with their roaming through the day.

Unlike buffaloes, who are too valuable to be allowed to wander on the streets by themselves, cows are protected only after they have calved and can be milked. The rest of the year, they are let loose to fend for themselves. The older residents of New Chandraval belong to the Gujjar caste and have kept cattle for generations.[3] A century ago, the area that is now Delhi University was their village's grazing land, and cows in this place today signify the continuity between the villagers' pastoralist past and the present. When the land was acquired for building the university, Gujjar men were compensated with jobs as *chaukidar*s (guards) in the university, while Gujjar women continued to exercise their right to harvest grass from the overgrown corners of what is now the Delhi School of Economics and the Law and Arts Faculties. While walls and barbed wire (and chaukidars) keep cattle out of these compounds, the street is the sole surviving element of Chandraval's once-extensive commons, where their cows still have right of way.

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[2] 'Old' Chandraval village still exists, but its lands have been swallowed up by schools, housing colonies, police stations, defence offices, and the Delhi Jal Board's water-treatment plant, leaving only the residential *basti* (working-class settlement).

[3] The village also has a substantial Jatav dalit basti, which does not keep cattle.

Chandraval is only one of Delhi's 275 villages, many of which still have families from traditional cattle-rearing castes — Jat, Gujjar and Ahir — running dairies supplying fresh milk to neighbouring urban households.[4] According to the Municipal Commissioner of Delhi, the city has 3,500 dairies and some 35,000 cattle.[5] The presence of these dairies, and the cows that issue forth from them into the city's streets, has long been a source of urban angst. The majority are 'unauthorized', a term that covers a long list of crimes and misdemeanours, all condoned as long as the dairy owner pays the right people. The fact that Chandraval village also has a side-business in supplying musclemen for local politicians, property brokers and others who need someone to lean on or be leant upon also helps give its dairies a degree of immunity from harassment by city authorities.

On their part, senior officials in the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) have wavered between the carrot and the stick. In 2004, they announced a 'massive drive' against stray cattle, and prepared an Action Plan and set up a special Task Force comprising officials from the water and power utilities besides the MCD. According to the Commissioner, the Task Force, accompanied by 'a strong contingent of police, would be moving around the Capital'.[6] To begin with, the power and water supply to these dairies would be discontinued. Then the cattle would be lifted in special vehicles and taken to three temporary *gosadan*s (cow shelters), which the MCD has recently set up on the outskirts of the city. 'The very next day these cattle would be auctioned between 11 am and 1 pm', the commissioner continued. However, as dairy owners strongly resisted this move and because lower-level municipal officials were reluctant to mess with them, the 'massive drive' was a non-starter. Ineffectual punitive campaigns have been punctuated by equally ineffectual incentives. Over the years, the MCD has established seven 'legal' areas on the outskirts of the city to relocate these dairies, of which Bhalaswa, Shahbad and Ghazipur are the largest. It periodically announces plans of providing more land where existing dairies can relocate,[7] but the allocations are far smaller than what is required, so the unauthorized dairies continue to flourish in the heart of the city, in violation of Delhi's Master Plan as well as many municipal laws and regulations, and cows continue to walk the streets.

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[4] Most of the milk from the Chandraval dairies is sold directly to individual customers, supplied by bicycle-borne *doodhvala*s (milkmen) who measure out milk on the doorstep. This seems to be on the decline, however, and the larger dairies sell milk to chilling plants that are part of the more formal milk-supply and processing chain. While most dairies are located in Delhi's villages, some are to be found even in the bungalows of Lutyens' New Delhi (see 'Remove Cows from VIP Bungalows', *The Hindu*, 9 March 2007, Delhi edition, p. 3).

[5] 'Drive against Stray Cattle', http://www.hinduonnet.com/2004/05/23/stories/2004052307890400.htm (accessed 6 March 2007). The Commissioner went on to add that these cattle emptied an estimated 700 tonnes of dung every day into the Yamuna river through the sewage system.

Matters would have continued thus but for a public-interest writ petition filed before the Delhi High Court by Common Cause, an NGO started by the late H. D. Shourie, noted citizens' rights activist.[8] Describing itself as 'an organization for ventilating the common problems of the people', Common Cause's members, like those of several such organizations in Delhi, are uniformly upper class — retired bureaucrats, army officers and industrialists, whose posh south Delhi addresses attest to their privileged status. The NGO has a history of litigating on urban issues and, in the past, has tried to secure far-reaching judicial orders against unauthorized residential colonies in Delhi. In July 2001, Common Cause petitioned the High Court to end 'the menace of stray cattle' after news reports of people being gored by cattle. According to the petition,

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[6] Ibid.

[7] 'Dairy Colony Proposed in North Delhi', http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/832997.cms (accessed 6 March 2007).

[8] Common Cause has an official website http://www.commoncauseindia.org/default.asp (accessed 6 March 2007).

> stray cattle squat on roads and throw traffic out of gear, which leads to accidents. The cattle also pose a health hazard since cows and stray dogs surround garbage dumps in colonies and make it nauseating for residents living nearby. The cattle often excrete on the roads, which causes filth and stench all around. Such excreta is a breeding ground for microbes which could spread various diseases. Also, it is an extremely abhorrent sight. Stray cows eat garbage from rubbish heaps due to which they fall sick and their milk was unfit for human consumption.[9]

In response, the High Court issued orders to the Delhi Government, the MCD and the New Delhi Municipal Committee to file Action Taken Reports (ATRs). However, there was little action to report since the municipal authorities pleaded that they did not have the staff or other resources to comply with the court's orders to get the cows off the roads. The case lurched on fitfully from hearing to hearing, but nothing very much happened till February 2005 when the news media reported that two people had been gored to death by a stray bull in east Delhi. Taking suo motu notice of the incident, the court once again asked the municipal authorities and the police about their plans to rid the city of 'the cattle menace'.[10] In August 2005, the judges came up with a novel scheme of involving citizens in the cattle-catching effort, by rewarding them with ₹ 2,000 for every animal caught.[11] This 'catch-for-cash' scheme excited great attention and much speculation about how it would be implemented. The judicial order said that the scheme would first be tried out in affluent south Delhi. The municipal authorities protested, saying that crafty citizens would drive cattle from other parts of the city into south Delhi to claim the reward.

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[9] http://courtnic.nic.in/dhcorder/dhcqrydisp j.asp?pn-1884&yr-2007 (accessed 3 February 2011).

[10] 'High Court Questions Police, MCD on Cattle Menace', http://www.hinduonnet.com/2005/02/10/stories/2005021010160400.htm (accessed 6 March 2007).

[11] 'Court Orders Cash for Catching Stray Cattle', http://www.thehindu.com/2005/08/05/stories/2005080509120100.htm (accessed 6 March 2007).

To pre-empt that, the MCD said that only bona fide south Delhi citizens carrying certificates issued by the Residents' Welfare Associations of their neighbourhoods would be eligible to get the reward. Despite the expectation that the cash prize would bring in crowds of cattle lassoed by cowboy-citizens, the MCD reported after two weeks that a total of seven cows had been caught under the scheme.[12]

So 'the menace of stray cattle' has continued to dog Delhi's streets. Common Cause tried to diversify its campaign by including stray dogs and rhesus monkeys in its list of stigmatized species, or animals unwelcome in urban environs.[13] Across India, other cities have also witnessed public-spirited citizens banding together to fight against cows.[14] Bangalore has been the front-runner in these campaigns, clubbing stray dogs to death (H. Karlekar 2008),[15] but Ahmedabad, Chandigarh and Mysore have not been far behind. All the campaigns cite concerns about traffic disruption, hygiene and the safety of citizens as the primary reasons why cows should be banned from urban public spaces.

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[12] 'Seven Stray Cattle Caught under Reward Scheme, Court Told', http://www.hindu.com/2005/08/19/stories/2005081909510400.htm (accessed 6 March 2007).

[13] Curiously, pigs haven't attracted their ire, even though they pose a serious threat to safety, especially in poorer neighbourhoods, where they have been known to bite and even kill young children. See 'Pig Kills Boy', http://www.hinduonnet.com/2006/11/29/stories/2006112921340100.htm (accessed 12 March 2007).

[14] See http://www.petitiononline.com/straycow (accessed 7 February 2011) for the full litany of cities' cow-related complaints. The petitioners suggest that a patented cattle-identification device, a chip called Rumitag, be inserted into the stomach of each stray cow so that a hand-held scanner passed over the belly of the beast can extract all the information about the animal. Such information, maintained in a centralized database, would help to identify and fine the owner of individual animals. The petitioners also endorse the use of a pneumatic blowpipe to tranquilize cattle and carry them away.

[15] The brutality of these campaigns has been criticized by animal-rights organizations, which draw most of their members from the same social stratum that produces bourgeois environmentalists. This supports my argument about the 'public-interest' orientation of the middle class, which may take a variety of forms, including those that run counter to each other.

Bourgeois environmentalists

I call these initiatives instances of 'bourgeois environmentalism', a term that needs explanation. Environmentalism in India has for long been described as an 'environmentalism of the poor' (Guha and Martinez-Alier 1998). Drawing upon iconic examples of environmental movements such as Chipko and Narmada Bachao Andolan, scholars and activists concur that Indian mobilization around the use and abuse of nature is intrinsically linked to issues of material distributive justice. Struggles over nature are perceived as combining shades of both 'green' ecological concerns and 'red' class politics, unlike the post-materialist concerns driving environmentalism in the North. Ramachandra Guha (2006) has subsequently revised this characterization to discuss another group of environmentalists who are at odds with the dominant current of 'the environmentalism of the poor': 'wildlife fanatics' and 'green missionaries' who propagate an agenda of authoritarian conservation by creating protected wilderness areas that exclude forest-dependent local people. Wildlife conservationists, many of them from former aristocratic families whose hunting was directly responsible for the decimation of animals and birds across India, embody a form of elite environmentalism that runs counter to the political and social concerns that drive 'the environmentalism of the poor'. By conceiving of conservation mainly in terms of creating protected parks and sanctuaries, wildlife conservationists fail to recognize how their resource-intensive affluent lifestyles destroy wildlife habitats worldwide. Such habitat destruction is the primary cause of the loss of biodiversity that they purport to save. This double think is the defining feature of bourgeois environmentalism.

If bourgeois environmentalism doesn't show many signs of being concerned about ecological sustainability, is it environmentalism at all? Its practitioners certainly see themselves as environmentalists and this is a self image that we must take seriously. For them, environmentalism is a mode of expressing and addressing their anxieties about themselves in relation to their habitat, that is, their physical surroundings, both proximate and distant, and other species.[16]

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[16] It should be noted that such environmentalism does not endorse a catholic love for all species, but discriminates between them on the basis of perceived qualities. Thus, in the urban context, mosquitoes, rats and cows

Concerns about health and hazard, beauty and order, pervade this mode and have precedence over issues of life and livelihood that are central to 'the environmentalism of the poor'. The sensibility that underlies these judgements is expressed in

> the language of modernity, of civic consciousness and public health, even of certain ideas of beauty related to the management of public space and interests, an order of aesthetics from which the ideals of public health and hygiene cannot be separated. It is the language of modern governments, both colonial and postcolonial, and for that reason, it is the language . . . of modern nationalists as well. (Chakrabarty 2002: 66)

The place of nature in the city is thus a matter to be ordered and regulated. For instance, the Delhi Master Plan's categorization of land use includes 'green areas', but these areas are not allowed to take the form of wilderness. The natural and naturalized vegetation of Delhi is to be found on the Ridge, the last spur of the Aravalli mountain range that, together with the Yamuna river, forms the parentheses enclosing the old Delhi of Shahjehanabad and the new Imperial Delhi built by the British. That part of the Ridge which has not been swallowed up by encroachments has been gradually cleared of its undergrowth and converted into parks by the Delhi Forest Department (Kalpavriksh 1991). The parks allow citizens to use green areas for recreation in a way that the rough 'jungle' of the Ridge does not. Green lawns, tidy flower-beds and neatly pruned trees are the form of 'nature's government' (Drayton 2000) that meet with the approval of bourgeois environmentalists. This 'improved' nature — garden, not jungle — is deemed superior

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are bad and should be removed, but pet dogs and ornamental trees are good and should be encouraged. The good/bad species list differs between social groups: many city dwellers scatter grain to feed birds, including pigeons and crows. The list has also changed over time: Mahesh Rangarajan (1998) provides a historical account of how bounties were offered in British India to kill tigers and leopards that were then regarded as vermin. The subsequent endowment of value to species such as lions, whales and polar bears — 'charismatic megafauna'— has been crucial to the success of conservation campaigns (Davis 1995).

to and is promoted over the unkempt, inchoate luxuriance of creepers and bushes through which scurry partridges, snakes and mongoose.[17]

Bourgeois environmentalists would frown on Esmeralda, the fabulous city of water described by Italo Calvino in his book *Invisible Cities* (1972), where canals and streets span and intersect each other, such that 'the ways that open to each passerby are never two, but many'. Esmeralda's inhabitants include

> cats, thieves and illicit lovers [who] move along higher, discontinuous ways, dropping from a rooftop to a balcony, following gutterings with acrobats' steps. Below, the rats run in the darkness of sewers, one behind the other's tail . . . A map of Esmeralda should include, marked in different coloured inks, all these routes, solid and liquid, evident and hidden. It is more difficult to fix on the map the routes of the swallows, who cut the air over the roofs, dropping long invisible parabolas with their still wings, darting to gulp a mosquito, spiralling upward, grazing a pinnacle, dominating from every point of their airy paths all the points of the city. (Calvino 1972: 88–89)

Esmeralda's fanciful map, like the urban geography traced by Michel de Certeau's city-walkers, would find no favour with bourgeois environmentalists who prefer to be *lakeer ke fakeer* (literally, 'seekers after the line', that is, sticklers for the letter of the law) and unswervingly follow formal rules and regulations, clear lines laid out in black and white. For them, cats, rats and illicit lovers are unwelcome transgressors to be (respectively) caught, killed and confined at home.

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[17] But it should be noted that Delhi's parks don't quite fit the notion exemplified in Frederick Law Olmsted's design of New York's Central Park — that a park should be an instrument of governing conduct (Joyce 2003: 220–22). If Central Park was the site for working-class persons to learn from the upper classes how to disport themselves without being drunk and disorderly, Delhi's parks offer not lessons in socially sanctioned recreation, but a refuge for illicit romance. In the garden surrounding Safdarjang's tomb, for instance, at sundown, when the park closes for the night, one can stand by the gates and see streams of courting couples emerging from the bushes, smoothing their hair and clothes, their departure mirrored overhead by parallel streams of large fruit-eating bats emerging from their tree roosts to forage. To me, this is one more example of the unruliness of Delhi, and how governmental intentions founder on the rocks of the everyday exigencies of lovers looking for privacy and park-keepers looking for additional income.

If bourgeois environmentalists are concerned with the ordering of nature in the city (and in the countryside), they pursue this concern through a strategy that further distinguishes their activism from 'the environmentalism of the poor'. Citizens' campaigns to control cows (and rickshaws, as we shall see in the subsequent section) have been routed through the courts, rather than being addressed to the municipal authorities charged with the responsibility of managing urban life. Impatient with bureaucratic procedures and the politics of compromise and accommodation, and unwilling to engage in mass mobilization of the sort that social movements strive for, bourgeois environmentalists prefer to use their privileged access to the media and the courts to achieve their ends. Bourgeois desires for an ordered environment are reflected and taken up by an activist judiciary, willing to step into the breach left by the executive and legislative branches of the state — a regulatory structure that is susceptible to political pressure and corruption.[18]

It should also be noted that the prominent role of bourgeois environmentalists in the pursuit of urban order in Delhi is rather different from the state-centric process described in the literature on urban governmentality (Joyce 2003).[19] Instead of the postcolonial government monopolizing the creation of 'rationalized schemes, programmes, techniques and devices which seek to shape conduct so as to achieve certain ends' (Rose 1999: 3), we see citizens at work, often at odds with the state administration. Their initiatives recognize that the state falls far short of its modernist ideals and that its authority is severely undermined by the actions of its own agents. It is the sovereign power exercised by the courts, at once arbitrary and extreme, that wins accolades from bourgeois environmentalists.

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[18] The emergence of this affinity between bourgeois environmentalists and higher-level judiciary is discussed at greater length in Baviskar et al. (2006).

[19] Even though Foucault's famous 1978 essay on governmentality (Foucault 1991) is meant to move away from state-centric theories in order to focus on how populations make themselves the objects of the government, much of the scholarship that he has inspired concentrates squarely on state practices. For an exception, see Li (2007).

Bourgeois environmentalists are also able to bypass the regular channels of government and approach the Supreme Court and the High Court as the first, and not the last, resort because of *how* they frame the issues that concern them. Keeping cows (and rickshaws) off the streets is a matter of 'public interest', a framing that the higher judiciary endorses. In fact, as I shall go on to show, these concerns do not reflect the priorities of all street users, but mainly those of that section of Delhi's population that uses personal vehicles, especially cars. Yet, their interests get normalized and universalized as those of the 'public', while the concerns and priorities of pedestrians and rickshaw riders and pullers (and cows and their owners), and all those who make money off them, are left by the wayside.[20] This, then, is another defining feature of bourgeois environmentalists: they claim to speak for the entire city, and even the nation (cf. Deshpande 1997). As the section on cars shows, this claim is based upon a fundamental misrecognition of the relationship between class and citizenship, consumption and civic concern. This misrecognition is reflected in the doublethink that is at work in the starkly opposed attitudes of bourgeois environmentalists to cows and rickshaws on the one hand, and to cars on the other.

Who are these bourgeois environmentalists when they're not filing cases in court, and how may we recognize them? It's hard to generalize about a group that is heterogeneous and encompasses a range of attributes in terms of income and consumption, education and occupation, and property ownership. To complicate matters further, bourgeois environmentalism is also a more generalized sensibility that exceeds identification with an empirically grounded class formation, and can be found in a diffused form even among those it may otherwise marginalize — the cycle-rickshaw puller, the Blueline bus driver, the dairy owner, who may all, at different times, decry the lawlessness of Delhi's streets and demand that the state act swiftly and peremptorily. However, in the context of this essay, I use the term to capture what in Hindi are referred to as *padhe-likhe log* (educated folk), a group instantly recognized by its dress, deportment and language. These are professionals, usually educated in private English-medium schools, and holding jobs as civil servants, bank employees, engineers, and university lecturers. They are likely to own their own homes and automobiles over the course of their lives, and are, in short, owners of cultural capital.[21] Since the onset of liberalization in the 1990s, this section has been educated into an awareness of its own power and entitlement by newspapers such as *The Times of India* and *Hindustan Times* and magazines like *India Today*, the media endorsing and celebrating this group's sense of itself as the guardian of 'public interest'.

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[20] Baviskar et al. (2006) traces the same argument in the case of the closure of 'polluting and non-conforming' industries, showing how the concerns of workers about work, health and safety were superseded by bourgeois environmentalists who projected air and water pollution as transcendental issues of 'public interest'.

The desire to make Delhi a 'world-class city' (Baviskar 2006), a Singapore or a Shanghai, is also promoted by the Delhi Government led by Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit of the Congress Party.[22] The Dikshit government's grand vision for remaking the city hinged on mega events such as the Commonwealth Games, which were held in 2010. Despite their relative obscurity in the international sporting world, the Delhi Government projected the Games as rivalling the Olympics in importance. Much of the spatial restructuring done for the Games entailed capital-intensive construction projects that were crucial for sustaining the patronage networks that keep the Congress government in power (Baviskar 2010). For the Games, the city must be beautified, with all ugly and awkward elements tucked away out of sight.[23] Yet, were it not for the support from the courts, the Government of Delhi would have had to temper its world-class ambitions with the need to not antagonize the city's voting populace. It would have been difficult to evict squatters from public lands, and remove hawkers from the streets, if the government did not have the courts breathing down its neck.

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[21] For a review of the literature on Indian environmentalism and the middle class, see Mawdsley (2004).

[22] See Anand (2006) for a similar account of making Mumbai world-class through improving and augmenting roads.

[23] For an account of the 'cleansing', ethnic or otherwise, of the banks of the Yamuna river as a prelude to the Commonwealth Games, see Amita Baviskar, 'A Lifeline under Seige', the *Hindu Sunday Magazine*, 6 November 2005, available at http://www.thehindu.com/the hindu/mag/2005/11/06/stories/2005110600030100.htm (accessed 6 March 2007). For a more comprehensive critique of the effect of the Commonwealth Games on Delhi, see Amita Baviskar, 'Commonwealth or White Elephant?', *Outlook City Limits*, 3(7): 16–23. July 2007, http://www.outlookindia.com/full.asp?fodname=20070711&fname=commwealthgames&sid=1 (accessed 6 March 2007) and Baviskar (2010).

Cycle-rickshaws

Among the undesirable objects to be banished from the streets are cycle-rickshaws.[24] In May–June 2006, the Delhi High Court ordered that, within three months, all cycle-rickshaws be removed from Chandni Chowk, the most important avenue in the Walled City of Shahjehanabad and the oldest commercial hub of the city. The High Court said that rickshaw pulling was against human dignity and resulted in the exploitation of poor rickshaw pullers by powerful and influential 'mafias', and that the unregulated plying of rickshaws caused congestion and inconvenience to the city's commuters. It directed that all 'arterial roads in the MCD [Municipal Corporation of Delhi] area should be strictly prohibited for the plying of cycle rickshaws' and ordered the MCD to take strict legal action against violators.[25] Ironically, this order caused much consternation among the very people who had petitioned the courts to regulate rickshaws, namely, traders in Chandni Chowk. They had wanted only a reduction in the number of rickshaws, but were instead handed a total ban. *The Hindu* news report quoted A. R. Javed, a resident:

> We welcome introduction of CNG [compressed natural gas] buses in our area as it will not only improve environment but also make commuting easier for people. However, cycle-rickshaw is also an eco-friendly mode of transport and convenient for residents of the Walled City area,

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[24] This section draws heavily upon the research and activism of Lokayan and Manushi, two NGOs that have led the campaign in support of cycle-rickshaws in the capital. See http://www.indiatogether.org/manushi/rickshaw/ (accessed 6 March 2007) for a comprehensive critique of the political economy of cycle-rickshaws in the city.

[25] Aman Sethi, 'Judicial Hump', *Frontline*, 18 November 2006. Also see 'Cycle Rickshaws: Victims of Car Mania', http://www.cseindia.org/campaign/apc/pdf/smog-2006-oct-3-rickshaw.pdf (accessed 11 March 2007).

> particularly for old people, women and children. CNG buses on main road are fine, but in the lanes and by-lanes we need rickshaws.[26]

As advocates of rickshaws point out, the cycle-rickshaw is the only non-polluting mode of public transport in Chandni Chowk. It should therefore be championed by city planners and environmentalists. Instead, it is reviled as the cause of traffic congestion and accidents, not only in the Walled City but all over the capital, wherever rickshaws ply. It is true, though, that the number of rickshaws in Delhi has grown exponentially. Until the 1980s, rickshaws were restricted to the Walled City and the east Delhi suburb of Shahdara, and were estimated to be about 20,000. In the 1990s, they entered other municipal zones such as Civil Lines and then the University of Delhi campus, where they rapidly became the preferred mode of short-distance travel for students. According to the then Traffic Police Commissioner, Maxwell Pereira, the number of licensed and unlicensed rickshaws in 2002 was anywhere between 200,000 to 500,000.[27] The vagueness of that estimate tells us just how little knowledge and control the top traffic officials have about this mode of transport. Today, there are estimated to be 600,000 rickshaws in Delhi, serviced by about 20,000 mechanics, and backed by thousands of others who own, assemble or manufacture the vehicles. According to Madhu Kishwar (2001), if one includes the family members dependent on the earnings of rickshaw-related work, a total of about five to six million people live off the cycle-rickshaw economy in the city.[28] If rickshaws were banned in the 'public interest' of bringing order to Delhi's streets, it would deprive a substantial section of the city's working class of its basic source of livelihood.

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[26] 'Chandni Chowk Residents Upset over Ban on Cycle Rickshaws', http://www.hindu.com/2006/06/04/stories/2006060412970300.htm (accessed 11 March 2007).

[27] Maxwell Pereira, 'How Cycle-rickshaws Multiplied', reprinted from *Mid-Day*, 13 November 2002, http://www.delhitrafficpolice.nic.in/articles/how-cycle-rickshaws-multiplied.htm (accessed 11 March 2007).

[28] It is unclear how this figure has been computed. Since many rickshaw pullers are young men who have migrated to Delhi without their families, one presumes that Kishwar is referring to the total number of dependents in urban *and* rural areas, and has assumed that each rickshaw puller sends money back to support a family of five members. Even with these maximalist assumptions, the figure is likely to be closer to four million, which is still a substantial figure.

It is these numbers that bourgeois environmentalists regard with unease. Rickshaw-pulling is the quickest employment opportunity available to male migrants into Delhi. It requires fewer resources and skills than other occupations: no financial, educational or social capital, just the strength of one's body and basic survival skills. People from rural areas who come to Delhi in the hope of making it in the city can relatively easily hire a rickshaw for about ₹ 40 a day, and earn enough to make ends meet, and perhaps even save some money. The work is hard and the conditions brutal: there is no respite if one is ill or if the weather is bad. The prospects of economic improvement and upward mobility are slim. Yet, such is the need for remunerative work, and such are the difficulties of entering other modes of employment, that thousands of migrants (and many long-time residents too) take up the cycle-rickshaw. As they doggedly keep their place on the roads, often jumping lights because that's the only way they can get a headstart over the motor vehicles that crowd and overtake them, rickshaws are a conspicuous irritant for car drivers.[29] The men who pull them are marked by their Bihari and eastern Uttar Pradesh accents, and quickly identified as migrants. Regulating rickshaws in the name of curbing urban congestion is, then, also tinged with anxiety about the influx of migrants into the city, and fears about the collapse of civic infrastructure under their weight.

There are supposed to be only 99,000 licensed rickshaws in Delhi. However, the actual number is estimated to be more than 600,000. Despite the High Court's order and the recommendation of the Court-appointed Committee that rickshaws be banned on arterial roads, they are all over the city, even sneaking into the exclusive area of Lutyens's Delhi (like the dairies). Part of Delhi's informal economy, what allows them to flourish is 'a tightly structured, highly formalized economy of corruption' (Barua 2007). Since no new rickshaw licenses are now issued, the majority of rickshaws are unlicensed and unauthorized, which makes them liable to be confiscated and destroyed, unless the owner can negotiate with municipal officials and pay them to leave the rickshaws alone. These transaction costs are much too high to bear for those who own only one rickshaw,[30] so only those who own several can survive in the business. By making regular, fixed bribes to the municipal authorities, rickshaw owners can ensure that their vehicles remain untouched. In fact, unlicensed rickshaws are often 'password-protected', with a codeword embossed or painted on the back of the rickshaw to identify it as one whose owner has paid his dues to the MCD officials.

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[29] The fact that they do not have lights makes them difficult to spot in the dark, contributing to their unsafe image.

If rickshaws disappear from Delhi's streets, they will take with them the primary source of earning for hundreds of thousands of workers and their families (and a significant part of the illicit earnings of municipal and police officials). They will also be missed by those who use them. This group spans the city's social and economic divides. Members of households that own one vehicle often use cycle-rickshaws for short trips. There is often a gendered pattern to this usage in that the car, scooter or motorcycle is generally driven by the adult male member of the household, leaving the women and children to take recourse to rickshaws more than men. Other reasons also help explain why rickshaws fill a gap in urban transport needs. As streets have been broadened to cope with the increase in vehicular traffic, pavements have been swallowed up, sometimes making way altogether for parking spaces, vendors and encroaching shops, all of which make walking more difficult and hazardous. Potential pedestrians and cyclists now take the rickshaw instead. For people who find walking difficult and for those carrying heavy bags, cycle-rickshaws are a convenient alternative.

Despite its obvious utility (economic, social and environmental), the cycle-rickshaw is seen to be an embarrassment in a world-class city in the making. It does not fit into the modernist vision of judges, the bourgeoisie, the Delhi Government, even though its proliferation attests to its eminent functionality. People from 'all walks of life' use cycle-rickshaws, and yet the upper-classes look down on this mode of transport. The Court may wish to ban the rickshaws and the Chandni Chowk traders may want their numbers regulated, but what municipal officials wish for is to keep the rickshaws on the streets in a perpetual state of illegality. It is this legal limbo that renders rickshaws vulnerable and fetches handsome earnings for municipal officials and the police.[31] This deep-seated interest of corrupt officials converges with the livelihood needs of poor migrants, and has so far neutralized the Court's dictum on rickshaws. Despite the September 2006 deadline, Chandni Chowk still has its rickshaws, as does the rest of Delhi.

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[30] According to the Cycle Rickshaw By-laws of 1960, framed under the Delhi Municipal Corporation Act of 1957, a person can only own one cycle-rickshaw and must pull it himself (widows and the handicapped can own up to five and can hire them out). In practice, most owners have anything from 10 to 50 rickshaws, which means that they're violating the law. At every level, cycle-rickshaws are caught in a web of illegality woven by the municipality. This is vividly described in Kishwar (2001).

Cars

> Imagine the following scenario: One fine morning, the Delhi government suddenly declares that no more than 50,000 cars and scooters will be allowed in the entire territory of our capital city, without ensuring an effective public transport system to make up for private vehicles . . . People have to have special government permits to own a car or scooter. Also that no family can get a license for more than one vehicle. Imagine further, that the government enacts a law stipulating that the person who is issued such a permit to own a car, a scooter, a bus or a truck has to drive that vehicle himself. If he allows someone else to drive it, the vehicle is liable to be forcibly seized by the Municipal Corporation and sold as junk, after being hammered to pulp . . . That even if there is clear evidence that the seizure was mala fide and that the municipal or traffic police inspector had confiscated several duly licensed vehicles simply to extract bribes, the owners of seized cars still have to pay a minimum fine of Rs 40,000 each, or 10 to 20 percent of the cost of their cars to get their respective vehicles released . . .
>
> Most educated and informed citizens would dismiss the above scenario as an impossibility. They would argue that such economic tyranny does not prevail even under outright dictatorial and fascist regimes, let alone in a democracy like India. And yet the situation I have just described does not represent any futuristic nightmare. It is the daily life experience

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[31] For a similar scenario regarding street hawkers in Mumbai, see Anjaria (2006).

> of lakhs of citizens in our capital city — a situation legitimised by none other than the Supreme Court of India. The reason no one has taken any note of it is that the victims are one of the poorest and marginalised groups of our society — the pullers and owners of cycle rickshaws in Delhi. (Kishwar 2001)

Madhu Kishwar's simple yet powerful evocation of the double standards at work on Delhi's streets shows how cycle-rickshaws and cars are treated in radically different ways in the city. Cars are the big blind spot in the mirrors of bourgeois environmentalists. According to a study by Resources for the Future, an environmental advocacy group, the number of motor vehicles on Delhi's roads almost doubled over eight years, increasing from about 1.5 million in 1997 to an estimated 2.7 million in 2005.[32] According to the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), even though these cars and (motorized) two-wheelers occupy more than 75 per cent of the road space in Delhi, meeting only 20 per cent of the city's travel demand (in contrast, buses occupy less than 5 per cent of the road space, but meet 60 per cent of the travel demand), there are no efforts to check the phenomenal growth in the number of cars.[33] To be sure, there are now heftier fines for traffic violations, aimed at encouraging people to drive better, but there are no initiatives to restrict the numbers of cars on the road, unlike in the case of cows and cycle-rickshaws. Cars cause congestion and they pollute: the switch to unleaded fuel notwithstanding, petrol- and diesel-run motor vehicles still contribute benzene, nitrogen and sulphur dioxide to the air, and the steep increase in the number of private vehicles has already begun to negate the gains from the switch to CNG for public buses and three-wheeler auto-rickshaws that occurred in 2000. Vehicle emissions make up 70 per cent of the total air pollution in Delhi.

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[32] http://www.planetark.org/dailynewsstory.cfm/newsid/39598/story.htm (accessed 12 March 2007). In an astonishing leap over two years, the number of motorized vehicles had risen to 5.2 million by 2007. Also see Mishra (2000) for more statistical data and analysis about the problem of private cars. For an evaluation of different kinds of transport needs, from the point of view of safety and affordability, see Mohan and Tiwari (1999). It should be noted that two-wheelers — motorcycles and scooters — have not attracted enough analytical attention, even though their numbers have increased exponentially in Delhi and across India. In 2007–08, 21 per cent of all vehicular trips in Delhi were by this mode (compared to 18 per cent in 2001). Two-wheelers are also sociologically significant because their acquisition is one way of signifying entry into the middle class.

[33] 'Choc-a-Bloc: Parking Measures to Leverage Change', http://www.cseindia.org/campaign/apc/pdf/parking_mono.pdf (accessed 1 July 2009). This report makes a compelling case against the expansion of parking spaces for personal vehicles. See also http://www.cseindia.org/campaign/apc/press_20061114.htm (accessed 12 March 2007). The Centre for Science and

Cars pollute, cause accidents and kill, far more frequently than cows or cycle-rickshaws.[34] Yet no one petitions the court to ban or even regulate the number of cars in Delhi (the city with the greatest density and absolute numbers of private-vehicle ownership in India). On the contrary, car-financing has made it easier to own a car. Advertisements on television and in the print media drive home the message that a car is something a scooter owner should aspire to, for the sake of his school-going son's self-respect among his peers or for his wife's comfort, and post-liberalization personal loans promise to make the dream a reality 'in equalized monthly instalments'. The latest in car consumerism is the Tata group's Nano, the car that is billed as costing only ₹ 100,000. Just as urban congestion took a turn for the worse after 'the people's car', Maruti 800, hit the streets in 1983, the Tata group's one-lakh car is likely to make traffic problems infinitely worse. But the private automobile is the ultimate fetish of mobility and freedom. Sudhir Rajan refers

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Environment almost single-handedly ran a powerful campaign titled 'Slow Murder' (see CSE 1996) to highlight the issue of air pollution from motor vehicles. It also approached the Supreme Court on the issue, resulting in the setting up of the Bhure Lal Committee that recommended the phasing out of all diesel-run public-transport vehicles in the city. This order threw a wrench in the wheels of Delhi's buses, taxis and auto-rickshaws, as owners were forced to change over to CNG-fuelled vehicles. However, private cars passed unscathed. The fact that public transport was thrown out of gear (and the number of buses on the road actually declined, even as the city's population increased) provided yet another compelling reason for people to find private solutions to commuting problems (Veron 2006).

[34] On the question of how law in the US apportions responsibility for accidents between cars (i.e., their safety features and other design elements), their drivers and the 'bystander' on the road, see Jain (2004).

to the ‘enigma of automobility’: that on the one hand, cars are taken as symbols of modernity — ‘the pleasures of the open road, speed, power, and personal control’ combined with ‘the functionality of covering distance, managing time, and maintaining certain forms of individuation’. Yet, on the other hand, they produce a range of risks and dangers which require intrusive governance:

> The vast enterprise of privatized transportation generates serious risks to human health and social welfare from accidents, pollution, and the wasteful consumption of energy and resources — risks that even individual drivers ordinarily face in the form of congestion, mishaps on highways, and the increasing costs of owning and maintaining vehicles . . . [This is the enigma of automobility, that] cars serve to create privatized spaces for individual drivers, but driving propagates socially shared effects that could quite conceivably undermine the individualist credo of personal vehicle use. (Rajan 1996, cited in Paterson 2007: 218)

Thus, even if it spends most of its time in gridlock and traffic jams, the private car does not seem to lose its aura.

Unlike on the issues of cows and cycle-rickshaws, on the subject of cars, state practices are much more unequivocal. Cars are necessary and desirable. Those who have the wherewithal to own, drive and ride them are, by definition, respectable citizens by virtue of their demonstrated property-owning power. The city government has taken numerous steps to smooth the passage of the owners/drivers/riders of cars: 42 flyovers were built across major intersections in time for the Commonwealth Games in 2010. Flyovers allow cars (and other motorized vehicles) to zoom ahead, but are useless for bicyclists and rickshaws, and force bus commuters to walk long distances to change buses.[35] Apart from building flyovers to eliminate points where cars have to stop (at traffic lights and pedestrian crossings), the government has also constructed some elevated walkways or subways at some points of heavy pedestrian movement.

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[35] The AIIMS and Dhaula Kuan flyovers require bus commuters to walk almost 1 km to change between the Ring Road and Aurobindo Marg or NH-8, respectively. However, as users of a motorized mode of transport, bus commuters also benefit from flyovers.

However, these are too few and far between to be of much help to most pedestrians in the city. Deterred by median and side barriers when they attempt to cross the road anyhow, people have to brave several lanes of on-rushing traffic, at serious risk of losing their lives. Easing the passage of cars has been accompanied by measures to ease their rest. The burgeoning problem of parking is being addressed by building multi-level parking lots and by converting pavements into parking spaces.

If the roads are crowded, build more roads. This simple supply-side solution has overwhelmingly prevailed over the more sustainable strategy of regulating private vehicles and investing in mass-transit systems.[36] The road space available to motor vehicles in Delhi has been expanded by widening roads (eating into footpaths) and allowing motor vehicles into the parallel lanes that were originally designed for bicycles (for instance, the Ring Road along Raj Ghat). But even that has not proved to be enough.[37] So plans are afoot to build an elevated road on top of the Ring Road that girdles the city. For the Commonwealth Games, the government constructed an expressway on the western bank of the Yamuna, as well as an elevated road linking the Games Village to the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium, cutting close to the historic 16th-century Humayun's Tomb area and shadowing over the Barapula bridge, built in 1621 by Emperor Jahangir's chief eunuch, Mir Banu Agha. Another project seeks to build a 225-km-long 'super ring road' around the city's periphery for trucks and buses that enter the city at night. All these schemes are meant to address the chief concern of the car-owning/driving/riding commuter. A journalist writing a business column approvingly reports of all these changes by defining the problem thus:

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[36] The Delhi Metro, the flagship mass-transit project of the government, is a conspicuous yet curiously insubstantial counter to this statement. In 2007–08, the Metro contributed only 4 per cent of the total vehicular trips made by commuters in Delhi (as compared to 41 per cent of all trips being made by bus), a share that, even with the completion of Phase 2 of the project, is unlikely to rise significantly. In the period that the Metro network has expanded, the proportion of total trips made by personal vehicles has *increased*, and not decreased. However, despite its tiny contribution to addressing Delhi's transport challenge, the Metro has had an enormous impact on the city's sense of itself, particularly along its routes and, more generally, as an icon of progress and efficiency. Since this essay confines itself to the street, the underground and overhead tracks of the Metro are outside its purview. However, it should be noted that, while the Metro may eventually emerge as an alternative to using one's personal vehicle and bring about a reduction in road congestion, its symbolic importance seems to be far more significant than its effect on traffic. As a mode of transport that seems to annihilate class distinctions by admitting everyone to the same elevated experience of being whisked through the city in air-conditioned comfort, the Metro holds out the promise of a more inclusive bourgeois mode of belonging in the city. While this promise is realized only by a small section of the working class (the Metro is considerably more expensive than the bus), it retains a powerful charge. The overwhelming approval of the middle class for the Metro derives from their enthusiasm for a mode of travel that conjures up a 'world-class' experience, as well as from their sense that within its heavily

> If you're a Delhi-ite, and there's a considerable distance between your home and your workplace, you'll know your day's work isn't done when office closes. Driving back home, you'll have to contend with the most exasperatingly democratic of roads where buses and cycles jostle for space.[38]

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surveilled premises, the Metro is educating the humbler citizens of Delhi — the burqa-clad woman from the Walled City; the working-class youth with gelled hair and MP3 ear-buds; the dark, skinny children from the resettlement colony dressed in their best for an outing to India Gate — into proper bourgeois conduct, thereby improving their lives and opening up the horizons of their minds. At such moments, one sees the hegemonic ideal of an inclusive public being actively negotiated in the public sphere.

[37] According to the CSE, 'During 1995–2006, while the road length in the city has increased by about 20 per cent, cars/jeeps have increased by 131 per cent and two-wheelers by 76 per cent' (see 'Choc-a-Bloc: Parking Measures to Leverage Change', http://www.cseindia.org/campaign/apc/pdf/parking_mono.pdf (accessed 1 July 2009).

[38] Jai Arjun Singh, 'Delhi a Super City by 2010', http://www.rediff.com/money/2005/jan/22spec.htm (accessed 12 March 2007).

Conclusion

Kaun jaye Zauq Dilli ki galiyan chhor ke
(Who would wish to leave the lanes of
Delhi and live elsewhere?)

Zauq (1789–1854)

Dilli jo ek shahr tha aalam mein intikhaab/Hum
rehne wale hain usi ujre dayar ke
(There was a city, famed throughout the world/Where dwelt
the chosen spirits of the age/Delhi its name, fairest among
the fair/Fate looted it and laid it desolate/And to that
ravaged city I belong.)

Mir Taqi Mir (1723–1810)[39]

The phrase 'exasperatingly democratic' used to describe road space in Delhi sums up the frustration of the car-rider. Delhi just has too many buses and cycles; they must make way to create exclusive avenues for cars and other private motor vehicles. Less well-to-do citizens and their modes of locomotion — walking, cycling and buses should be banished from the streets.[40] If the republic of the streets is perceived to be a problem, the public sphere of judicial space where grievances are supposed to be heard and resolved — the space of *sunvai* (hearing) — has already been shrunk by the courts. The voices and perspectives of cattle owners or cycle-rickshaw owners or pullers were excluded from the courts that decided upon their future.

In this essay, I've tried to argue for the resilience of 'the republic of the streets', its survival in spite of efforts by the courts and the bourgeois environmentalists to suppress its unruliness. The embodied public sphere that is the city-street reasserts itself, foiling bourgeois attempts to impose urban order by excluding cows and rickshaws. Bourgeois efforts have been undone as much by their own hubris as by their failure to deal with (*i*) the corrupt collaborations between cow owners, rickshaw owners and municipal officials, and (*ii*) their misrecognition of their own complicity in creating urban congestion by driving private vehicles. These complex interdependencies have averted imminent collision between different social sections and enabled 'the republic of the streets' to survive. That said, I am not sanguine about the survival of this public sphere. It is contingent upon the continuation of complex equations between state and elected officials *and* those who pay them off, the courts' fluctuating levels of interest, the degree of mobilization by bourgeois environmentalists and, last but not the least, the power of those who benefit from the liberalization project to secure their vision. Like Delhi's streets, this path too is an adventure into the unknown.

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[39] Zauq and Mir Taqi Mir, both quoted in Jacob (2001).

[40] The survival of working-class people in the city is already much harder because of the large-scale demolition of squatter settlements over the last four years (Baviskar 2006).

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